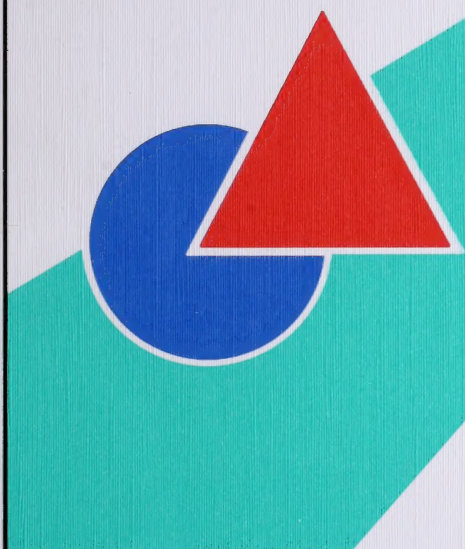


# **SPIRITAN LIFE**



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**Torre d'Aguilha  
2004**

***Spiritan Life*** aims at being a forum for Ongoing Formation and Animation:

- *through the shared experience of confreres,*
- *through reflection on these experiences,*
- *through the inspiration of our founders, our tradition and the demands of mission.*

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A few months ago, you received the booklet of the General Chapter. If you were not personally involved, these texts may appear somewhat abstract and remote. It is not always easy to appreciate the content of all these analyses, recommendations and guidelines, so this edition of "Spiritans' Life" should help you to capture some of the vitality of the last General Chapter in its particular context - the lived experiences of Spiritans, professors and associates as were related by 27 of them at Tome d'Agout in June-July of last year. In reading these testimonies, you will better appreciate the "why" and the "wherefore" that lies behind the capitular documents.

But these accounts of lived experiences are much more than simple "illustrations" of another text which is of greater importance. We have no need of new texts to add to those from the past in our world, which is so changeable and cruel for the poor and the forgotten, in our slow evolutions which, without exception, are in need of money, of personnel, of a new dynamism, in our lives which are so full of noise and sometimes empty, despite, or because of, a thousand and one absorbing activities. What we need above all is a renewal of hope.

In my opinion, the accounts given at the Chapter, which will probably reflect some of your own spiritual experiences, are a true lesson in hope. They show us how hope is born of a mixture of faith and faith. Not one of them tries to "sugar the pill" or to conceal or minimise what is wrong with our world, our contemporary and our lives. Without an acute awareness of evil and sin (including our own), there can be no genuine hope, but only an optimism which is smug and empty. But neither do these accounts fall into the trap of pessimism, which is a form of pride for those who refuse to recognise their need of the Other (be it God), both in the proximity of the daily Lord, in the action of the Spirit in the world and the Church, and in the compassion of the Father for all his children transfigured suffering and hope.

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## EDITORIAL

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A few months ago, you received the booklet of the General Chapter documents, entitled "*Torre d'Aguilha 2004*". For those who were not directly or personally involved, these texts could appear somewhat abstract and remote. It is not always easy to appreciate the context of all these analyses, recommendations and guidelines, so this edition of "*Spiritan Life*" should help you to capture some of the vitality of the last General Chapter in its particular context – the lived experiences of Spiritans, professed and associates, as were related by 27 of them at Torre d'Aguilha in June-July of last year. In reading these testimonies, you will better appreciate the "why" and the "wherefore" that lies behind the capitular documents.

But these accounts of lived experiences are much more than simple "illustrations" of another text which is of greater importance. We have no need of new texts to add to those from the past! In our world, which is so changeable and cruel for the poor and the forgotten, in our circumscriptions which, without exception, are in need of money, or personnel, or a new dynamism, in our lives which are so full of bustle and sometimes empty, despite, or because of, a thousand and one absorbing activities, what we need above all is a renewal of hope.

In my opinion, the accounts given at the Chapter, which will probably reflect some of your own spiritan experiences, are a fine lesson in hope. They show us how hope is born of a mixture of trials and faith. Not one of them tries to "sugar the pill" or to conceal or minimise what is wrong with our world, our communities and our lives. Without an acute awareness of evil and sin (including our own), there can be no genuine hope, but only an optimism which is smug and empty. But neither do these accounts fall into the trap of pessimism, which is a form of pride for those who refuse to recognise their need of the Other (or others). Faith in the proximity of the risen Lord, in the action of the Spirit in the world and the Church, and in the compassion of the Father for all his children transforms suffering into hope.



May the reading of these testimonies revive the joy of hope in every one of you.

Rome, September 8, 2005, the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady.

Jean-Paul Hoch  
Superior General

# FIRST EVANGELISATION IN EAST CAMEROON: MISSION AMONG THE BAKA

Daniel Taba

*Spiritans have been engaged for more than 70 years in the evangelisation of East Cameroon. They have worked especially with the Baka Pygmies, often despised and exploited by the Bantus. In this context, our confreres are committed to preaching a gospel of justice and peace, seeking a harmonious development which respects both the natural environment and the culture of the Bakas. But care must be taken, where relationships are sometimes difficult and tense, to keep a balance between the Baka and the Bantu; to favour one side, even if they are a voiceless minority, would be a dangerous path to follow. Daniel Taba, a member of PAC and ordained in 1990, has lived some years with these people, and he tells us of his approach to this significant experience of Spiritan mission.*

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<b>Statistics:</b>	<b>CAMEROON:</b>	475,000 Km <sup>2</sup> 16 to 17,000,000 inhabitants
	<b>Eastern Province:</b>	108,790 Km <sup>2</sup> 400,000 inhabitants
	<b>The BAKA:</b>	60,000 people

## Introduction

For several thousand years people have lived in the forest. Among them are the **pygmies**, semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers, and groups of **Bantus** who practise a slash-and-burn type of agriculture. These people have developed ways of life that are part and parcel of the ecological system of the forest. They have lived in harmony with it.

In recent decades the forest has been radically altered through intensive logging. On average 250 articulated lorries leave East Cameroon every day for the port of Douala. Each lorry carries at least five trunks. This whole enterprise involves opening up many roads through the forest, intensive hunting and the development of agriculture for cash crops. So the ecological balance has been profoundly disturbed, and in some cases completely destroyed.

The situation has been worsened by the economic crisis and by the government opting out of any responsibility. It is the local people who suffer the consequences. They look on, helpless, while an important part of their livelihood disappears. This is especially disastrous in the enclaves and zones where the pygmies and groups of Bantus live. They are excluded from any form of development. It is made worse by the inequalities between the pygmies and the sedentary Bantus. Of the ten provinces making up Cameroon, the East is the poorest. And yet it is the richest!

Although they increasingly practise subsistence agriculture the pygmies rely mainly on the forest for their food, and indeed for their culture. Squeezed by the disappearance of the forest as a source of food, attracted by consumer goods and anxious to be recognized as human beings, the Pygmies are forced into a development that obliges them to open up to the external world and which demands a veritable transformation of their way of life. For they have to live in a society whose values are beyond their comprehension. The result is instability.

This situation poses lots of questions to the Spiritans sent to work in the East. Their method of evangelisation has been largely shaped by it. (*Fr. Ignace Dehlemmes*).

### ***The Forest: The Baka's Universe***

The Baka, hunter-gatherers, have to learn the hard way how to become sedentary. They haven't got there yet, and retain many aspects of their ancient civilisation. It is estimated there are some 60,000 of them in a population in East Cameroon of 400,000.



They live in the heart of the equatorial forest. It is their natural milieu, their universe that has provided the infrastructure to the whole of their civilisation. It is the mother that feeds them and that has given them, until recently, all they need. Ruthlessly exploited, the forest is being depleted of its resources. This has plunged the Baka, and the Bantus, into ever greater misery and is destroying their culture.

Life expectancy among the Baka is 23 years, a horrifying figure. (It is 55 for the others). Statistics on death rates and sickness are worse than for the rest of the population, and the Baka are prone to all sorts of illnesses: yaws (tropical ulcers), ulcers, parasites, dermatitis, TB and AIDS – the latter is ravaging the Pygmies who, up to five or six years ago, were untouched by this pandemic.

The Baka are one with the forest. They share its organic essence along with other living creatures. Their religion helps them relate to *Komba* (God) and to the ancestral spirits and other inhabitants of the forest. So there is no need to transform nature but to live on what it provides – great importance is given to luck, or chance. The latter is controlled by the women and manifested in the generosity of nature. It is an important aspect to take into account, since most initiatives for development are based on subjecting nature to human control and transforming it.

However, little by little the Baka are adopting agriculture. Production is poor as yet, since their traditional activities don't follow an agriculture calendar and they have a different concept of time and work. This also applies to the religious world of the Baka.

Religion penetrates all aspects of their life. There is one god, *Komba*, creator of all and provider of what humans need. It is he who guarantees the social order. In a culture where hunting and gathering are the main activities, luck, situated in the forehead (*libandjo*), has an important place. Finding their daily food depends above all on luck, and it is God who gives it. The heads of families and the elders are the special mediators between God and the

other members of the group. It is they who administer blessings (saliva mixed with the powder of *padouk*).

### **Baka – Bantu Relations**

Every day the Baka of Lomié bring a part of what they caught in the hunt, or what they gathered, to their Bantu “boss”. In exchange they receive iron tools (knife, machete, spears...), and also agricultural products. According to the seasons, the Baka men clear the bush for new plantations and their wives help the village women to harvest and transport goods. For a day’s work they receive a little salt, rice, used clothes, a couple of cigarettes or a glass of locally brewed alcohol. These have become very valuable in their eyes, so much so that a Baka man from Lomié is ready to do anything to get them. The Bantu are aware of this and use it as bait. As sedentary farmers the Bantu need the manual labour of the Baka and hire it at ridiculous prices. Why?

Because over the centuries friendships and alliances have been forged between the Bantus and Baka family heads through blood pacts. Somewhat naïvely, the Baka believe in these. But for the Bantu it is a way of getting free labour. These blood pacts make the Baka the official private property of the Bantu headmen.

In the Lomié region, which I know well, there was always a Baka settlement next to a Bantu village. So every Bantu chief had his Baka slaves, which he used as he wanted. In former times he had the right of life or death over them.

They are accused of all sorts of evil: of being thieves, liars, and chimpanzees... They are denied all justice. This means that if a Baka has a problem with a Bantu, it is judged by the Bantus. The Baka is always in the wrong, even when he is evidently in the right. He is never compensated nor given rights. He has no identity card, is illiterate, has no knowledge of the machinery of administration, and cannot go to the authorities, for he has no juridical existence.

Faced with such a sombre picture, how can Spiritan missionaries, committed to Christ and at the service of the poor, remain

indifferent? Isn't the gospel they preach the Word of God that gives life and freedom?

### **Our Missionary Commitment**

From the 1950's Fr. Ignace Dhellemes C.S.Sp. paid particular attention to the Baka, working out of the leper colony of Kouamb in Abong-mbang. At first he was interested in the origins of the Baka. Later, from his base in Souanké he travelled throughout the forests of East and South Cameroon, as well as the north of Congo Brazzaville, making a census of the Pygmies. Thanks to this work we have a more exact knowledge of their number.

His first concern was not to baptise whoever turned up but rather to get to know them and stay among them as a brother while trying to understand them better in order to help them. It was only in 1959 that he baptised the first Baka as he was dying. For forty years Fr. Ignace strove to help them, care for them, defend them and walk by their side in their various attempts at becoming autonomous vis-à-vis the Bantus.

On my arrival in Lomié in 1994 I took part in an important meeting to evaluate the work of the missionaries with the Baka. We came to the conclusion that our presence among them since 1957 had made no improvement whatsoever in their lot, and even less in their relations with the Bantus. The gap separating them had even widened! The reason was that the more we dedicated ourselves exclusively to the Pygmies the more the Bantus mistreated them. So we changed our strategy: we set up a new development structure called AAPPEC (Activities for the self-development of the populations of East Cameroon). This would aim at helping not only the Baka but the Bantu as well, since both need to hear the Good News. For the Bantu the Good News makes it clear that the Baka are not animals but human beings like them, created in the image and likeness of God. For the Baka, the Good News helps them to recognise that they too are the beloved children of God (Komba), that they must throw off their inferiority complex, and that Bantu and Baka must live as brothers and sisters. We wanted to underline our willingness to change and to work for social justice,



so I, as the one in charge of the new project, recruited Baka and Bantu animators – about 200 of them, with responsibilities in different types of activities such as: health care, primary education, agriculture, justice and peace, formation, communication and catechetics.

Those working in *health care* were generally Baka and Bantu nurses and assistants. They often travelled on motorbike or by car to treat the sick in the Bantu villages and Baka settlements. In the *Primary Education* sector we used the SJA (See – Judge – Act) method as developed by Brother Antoine of the Christian Schools congregation. This gave a special place to the Baka language and culture. AAPPEC has at present some 60 Primary Education centres where more than 3,000 Baka and Bantu children learn to read and write.

With regard to *justice and peace*, people are helped to understand their rights and duties as full citizens of Cameroon. They are encouraged to obtain the official documents such as a birth certificate and an identity card. In the *catechetics* sector Fr. Paul has set up a method adapted to their culture. The Baka, like many Africans, are a people of oral culture, and so they are split into small groups where they try to read the Gospel in their language, then they memorise it and afterwards sing it to their own tunes. In that way they can sing it wherever they go: while nursing the baby, working in the fields, walking along the road, bathing... So they can live with the Word of God. This method has borne fruit. The Gospel becomes something the people have absorbed into their oral tradition. It is not only received but also celebrated in song and dance. It even appears in Baka story form!

By my humble presence in the midst of the Baka, with great respect for their culture, the Gospel is offered to them as the Good News of salvation and liberation, both in word and deed. Today many of them have converted to Christianity. Of the 60,000 Baka in East Cameroon more than 40% have become Christians. Chapels exist in the majority of hamlets. Prayers are said and the Mass celebrated in the Baka and Bantu languages. We have formed more and more catechists, and they do tremendous work. Now the Baka are being

forced to become sedentary because of the cutting down of the forest, and so our presence here is more necessary than ever: first of all to help them find an alternative life style and then to help them, through the Gospel, to deepen their existing religious vision and enrich it with an understanding of God as the one Father of all, of man as God's partner, of the meaning of offerings and sacrifices for the hunt, of the unbroken chain of life...

On the other hand we have to ask serious questions about the christianisation of the Baka. There is the problem of our moral and ethical teaching and the way in which the new message is transmitted. The Christian religion teaches that there is good and evil, and that people will be punished or rewarded according to their choice. The Baka culture, as so many others of the Negro-African world, is not aware of this radical duality – rather they speak of good and less good. With them it is more a question of shame than of guilt.

## Conclusion

70 years ago we were practically the only actors on the scene of evangelisation in East Cameroon. Today it is invaded by American sects. "Born-again" churches penetrate their milieu more easily than us, bringing their errors with them. They create a climate of fear and superstition, threatening their faithful with the devil, a person unknown to the Baka. So missionary work among the Baka is far from over. It is just beginning. In this age of competition and serious crises on the economic, social and cultural levels we have to have the means of redefining our presence and relationships with the Baka and the Bantu. East Cameroon is increasingly becoming the scene of one of the worst ecological catastrophes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to the destruction of the equatorial forest and the mining of cobalt and nickel etc. The terrible effects of all this will come to light in the near future.

The Baka pygmies have shown a clear willingness to be open to the so-called modern world, and so are open to the Word of God. This appears in the rapid changes in their society: less nomadism, an effort to adopt agriculture, more consumption of imported goods,

like European clothes, shoes, radio-cassette recorders... But the Baka are still attached to the milieu of the forest, not just because of the resources it provides but because it governs their whole culture: their understanding of religion, time, kinship, male-female relationships, organisation of work, good and evil... They refuse to be uprooted from the forest.

As with all minority groups, they need help and support. Our mission today, as yesterday, is based on the witness we give to love. We must be increasingly present among this marginalised people, in solidarity with their suffering, supporting them and helping them negotiate the waters of development, taking into account their understanding of time, of society, of the contradictions they face up to: in short, their special situation. Above all, let us not forget that the Baka are not an island and that they are inextricably linked with the Bantu, through marriage, alliances, pacts, rituals and tensions. Any approach we take towards the Baka inevitably must involve the Bantu, directly or indirectly. It has taken us missionaries 70 years to understand that.



# MISSIONARY CONTRIBUTION TO THE LOCAL CHURCH IN ZIMBABWE

Leo Eke

*In his presentation on the contribution of the missionary to the local Church, Leo stresses the role of primary evangelisation combined with mission as collaboration. He goes on to highlight the main areas of engagement by Spiritan confreres in this often very difficult mission territory. Leo was ordained in 1990 and is a member of the Nigerian Province.*

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## Spiritans in Zimbabwe

Spiritans celebrated twenty years of missionary presence in Zimbabwe this year. The mission in Zimbabwe was started by a small group of Spiritans from the province of Nigeria in 1984 in response to an appeal for help by the diocese of Mutare. Today the group is an International Group. We are now working in three dioceses out of the eight dioceses in the country. We work in Mutare, Kokwe and the Archdiocese of Harare. Recently, the bishop of Masvingo has written us a letter of invitation.

The bishops invite us to their dioceses when they see how we live our Spiritan charism. In one of my discussions with the late bishop of Harare he said: "I like Spiritans because they are open, hardworking and have no hidden agenda in their missionary approach".

Spiritans are very active in the following areas:

## Primary Evangelisation

Primary evangelisation is at the heart of our Spiritan charism. Hence, many of us are working in difficult rural areas. In these areas the Church lacks local clergy and some missionaries refused to take appointments to work in them. Some who were in these missions before us withdrew their members due to harsh conditions. These missions are low-lying, drought prone areas where wildlife abounds.

In all our missions we encourage people to be self supporting by helping them to establish income-generating projects like brick-making, sewing, bakery, grinding mills, the keeping of livestock and opening small tuck-shops. These projects bring them together and help them share their joys and sorrows, as they sing hymns and say their prayers after a day's work. After work they come together and plan how they may visit the sick, the lonely and AIDS orphans.

## *Mission as Collaboration*

We have only come to assist the local Church which has the primary responsibility for evangelisation, (Maynooth 5). In all our missions we have collaborators, teachers, catechists, lay leaders, men and women who participate fully in the work of evangelisation. In our missions most of the work is done by the local people. Our job is to encourage them, entrusting them with greater responsibility, visiting the communities from time to time and celebrating the sacraments together. In the absence of the pastors, the people organise services in their Small Christian Communities.

## *Raising of Local Clergy*

To form an indigenous clergy is the most useful and important thing to which we must attend with all our might. This indigenous clergy will give life to what the missionaries begin, (Message of Francis Libermann).

When Spiritans came to the diocese of Mutare in 1984, the diocese had only nine diocesan priests and there were no vocations to the priesthood. The bishop appointed one of us as Director of Vocations. With the help of the Spiritans, the diocese can now boast of eighteen diocesan priests and many senior seminarians. Many new priests were cared for by Spiritans during their formation.

### *Education*

In line with the Spiritan tradition, we see education as an integral part of our work of evangelisation. Thus, Spiritans in Zimbabwe have played a vital role in education. Our motto is "Catch them Young". We adopted the method of Bishop Shanahan and the Irish confreres who worked in Nigeria. We believe that through the school apostolate we can talk to the youth and preach the Word of God to them. In almost all our missions we have a crèche or pre-school. We represent the bishop as the responsible authority in seven schools belonging to the diocese. Recently we have built our own secondary school called Holy Ghost College. We are aware that the bishops may take back their parishes at any time, as the diocesan priests are increasing, but they may not take control of the schools which were built and are owned by the Spiritans. These schools will continue to be the Spiritan legacy to the mission in Zimbabwe. Two of us are chaplains to two universities: African University owned by the Methodist Church and Catholic University in Zimbabwe owned by the Catholic Church. One of us acts as Education Secretary to the diocese of Gokwe, while another is a full-time, government-employed teacher.

### *Justice and Peace*

Charity begins at home! We are paying our workers just wages and we help poor orphans to pay school fees. Sunrise Solidarity Trust, a dimension of Spiritan solidarity initiatives, takes care of AIDS orphans, the uprooted street children and the little ones in the



drought prone areas of Marange, Nyanyandzi and Gokwe. The Spiritans in Zimbabwe make themselves the advocates of the weak and the voiceless. Several times we have spoken out against unjust structures. Several times we have been warned and threatened by those who set up those structures.

### *All is not Rosy*

All has not been rosy and hitches have not been wanting. "African missionaries for Africa." This is the term that aptly describes the international Spiritan team working in Zimbabwe. We are doing our work, trusting in God. We have no Medical Aid because we cannot afford to pay for it. We sometimes find it difficult to pay for flight tickets for holidays. Sometimes the lack of personnel affects our community life. Sometimes our bishops do not keep to the terms agreed upon in contracts. What shall we do? Abandon the work and the people of God because of contracts? We are working for the local Church and for the younger confreres coming after us, be they from SCAF or Zimbabwean Spiritans. Among our present group of eighteen Spiritans from Nigeria and the EAP only of us has a permanent resident's permit.

### *Conclusion*

Zimbabwe, the paradise of Africa, is presently going through a period of difficult socio-economic conditions. A recent survey revealed that 85% of the population lives below the acceptable poverty line. Most of these are in the rural areas where Spiritans work. Many of Zimbabwe's problems make international news headlines: AIDS, the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), land redistribution, lack of foreign currency, high inflation and lack of freedom of expression.

*"We thank God that identification with the people we serve is nothing new in the Congregation. This sharing the lot of people in*

*good times and bad, is still the ideal of the Spiritans throughout the world", (Itaici).*

## MISSION TODAY IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS: ANGOLA

Barnabe Sakulenga

*Barnabe, ordained in 1987, has until recently been provincial in Angola. Here he outlines the post war situation in this country. He describes the challenges that face the country, civil society and the Church, in the construction of a democratic state which offer liberty, equality and opportunity to all.*

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After 40 years of war Angola is at last in peace; forty years of suffering, violence and death. A seemingly endless Calvary. Peace has come, the weapons have been silenced - forever, we hope. The war left the Angolan people with a very heavy inheritance:

- Divisions, antagonisms and mistrust between different ethnic and social groups.
- The agglomeration of refugees and displaced people, as villages and towns were wiped out.
- A multitude of adolescents and young people with nothing to do – no schooling, no jobs, no hope for a better future, destined to delinquency, thieving, prostitution and drugs. (Let's not forget that many of these young people were born on the street and have grown up there).
- The quality of life has deteriorated a lot, with health-care, education, housing, transport and basic sanitation seriously damaged. Whole families find themselves plunged in poverty, misery and hunger. The number of people HIV positive and with Aids has increased, as has the number of drug addicts. There are no organised solutions.
- Inequalities in the distribution of products, wealth and opportunities among different ethnic groups and provinces, and the emergence of a class of selected and protected rich people.
- A government and administration do not offer efficient and transparent services in the management of the common



good but which, on the contrary, are busy creaming off public funds, while keeping salaries low, in stark contrast to the high cost of living.

- The uncontrollable flourishing of religious sects and the increase of activities related to witchcraft.
- Growing secularisation and moral relativism, with adverse consequences on behaviour, ethics and citizenship, and leading to a decrease in religious practice.

## Challenges

As you can see, the problems created by the war have been replaced by others in this time of peace. They present real challenges to the Angolan nation, the government, and civic society, the Church and, in particular, to the Congregation.

- To the Angolan nation there is the challenge of involving all Angolans in the national reconstruction, whether those whom the war forced into exile or those who were scattered to other parts of the country. This means that national reconciliation is the necessary and sure path to establishing real peace, harmony and happiness. The war destroyed physical and mental structures and brought about the separation and division of thousands of families. There are wounds which are still bleeding and hate to be overcome... all of which are aggravated by political and party intolerance.

The second challenge is that of forging into a unity the different tribes and ethnic groups, especially those whose culture is less developed, so as to create one single nation in which each and every one can be given recognition and an identity. This will mean a civic society which is not sold off to different powers that would threaten its unity: economic- the emergence of an elite that decides the use and benefits of the nation's money; cultural – the system by which a small number of families obtain academic degrees in modern technology, at the expense of pupils who are more able but who have no “godfather; religious – the

swarming of sects financed by “powers” out to weaken the Catholic Church.

- **To the Government.** There are lots of challenges here. I underline a few:
  - The resettlement of displaced people and the dignified treatment of the demobilised soldiers and their families.
  - The rebuilding of social and economic infrastructures destroyed by the war.
  - The establishment of a democracy free of certain vices like the tyranny of political parties and political intolerance.
  - The democratisation of state institutions.
  - The disarmament of the civilian population and the social reintegration of ex-soldiers (always a possible cause of instability if not given the attention they deserve).
  - Greater freedom of expression, shown in greater freedom of the press in the whole country.
  - More decisive action in the fight against AIDS.
  - Clear policies to reduce illiteracy, which, according to reliable sources, cripples 60% of the population.
- **To the Catholic Church.** There is the challenge, in the Pope’s words, of an evangelisation “*new in its fervour, methods and expressions*”. This calls for technical commissions capable of managing human situations in truth, charity, justice and solidarity. These are the foundations and pillars of true peace.
- **To the Congregation.** To be a Spiritan missionary in Angola today means facing up to many challenges. In solidarity with the people, especially with the poorest, they challenge us. So our mission tries to give emphasis to:
  - Fostering Christian communities and forming a committed and responsible laity.

- Developing the formal and informal sectors of education as integral aspects of our evangelising mission.
- In our missions and parishes, in the day-to-day, we try to guarantee the sacraments, train the catechists, expand the social and charitable assistance to the needy, and encourage and support initiatives in favour of development.
- Our social outreach will take concrete forms in the areas of health-care, teaching, literacy programmes and sessions on human rights.
- We give particular attention to questions of justice and peace, beginning with the proclamation of the Gospel in Christian communities. We try to awaken in people their capacity to be critical and to denounce all types of injustice, whether cultural, religious, political or economic, imposed from abroad as a condition for receiving aid, for example, the imposition of immoral methods of birth control.
- To walk with the people and support them, within our possibilities, in the difficult and delicate process of resettlement. To do pastoral work in an urban setting where the shantytowns and estates are becoming a veritable ocean of extreme poverty surrounding islands of opulence. The emphasis here will be on pastoral work with the youth, whose situation calls for social and educational works.
- Pastoral work among the military in such a way that they take the first steps towards reconciliation of the big Angolan family. Yesterday they were used by politicians to defend ideologies and parties. Today they seem to be ignored. They too offer the Spiritans an apostolic challenge. In this context, an unusual and significant pastoral initiative has been undertaken by a confrere from the Spanish Province. He visits barracks where he runs sessions on national reconciliation. The soldiers, as well as others, are very keen on these sessions.



## Conclusion

The greatest challenge, in post-war Angola, to the Church and the Congregation is to rebuild the soul of the Angolans and give them back dignity and hope, through the God of freedom, for a better future. Angolans were profoundly wounded in the depths of their being. For years they were under the sign of death. To rebuild and unify this being, this identity, and this soul – that is the great task for all Angolans.

# MISSIONARY PRESENCE IN SITUATIONS OF CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT: THE CASE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Oscar Ngoy

*The experience of our confreres working in the DRC shows how difficult it is to minister in an area that has been torn apart by conflict; like others, they have to develop a missionary strategy of action, but most of their witness resides in “the mystery of an attentive and creative presence as a sign of hope for the people of God”. Oscar Ngoy, the superior of the Foundation of Congo Kinshasa and ordained in 1992, speaks on behalf of his confreres involved in this kind of mission, who are trying to carry out their work with often ridiculously inadequate means, but who are strengthened to know that they are supported by the solidarity of the Congregation.*

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## Introduction

What sort of postcard would convey most closely the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo today? This vast and beautiful country, which at the time of independence in 1960 enjoyed a prosperity with great promise for the future, was the envy of the continent. The reign of Mobutu destroyed this hope. The Church went through a long period of tensions and conflicts in this time of political terror. Since 1998, the Congo has been experiencing its worst period on all levels: the country has been balkanised, peoples displaced and decimated, the economy torn apart and the infrastructure destroyed; it has been a time of rancour and trauma, life has been precarious and insecure – physically, morally, spiritually and religiously. How can the mission of Christ be lived in such a situation of conflict? What missionary attitudes, what strategies and orientations should be adopted, before and after the conflicts? I would like to share my little missionary experience with

you, in the concrete situation of the Democratic Republic of Congo from 2000 up to the present.

### Healing the wounds

“Good morning, Commandant!”. This greeting, with the gestures that went with it, has become engraved in my memory. It was 6.15 in the morning. I was going out with L’Abbé Joseph, the parish priest in the cathedral of Manono, to celebrate the Eucharist. On the way, we met a little boy about three and a half years old. Seeing us pass by, he ran out of his compound with a little stick in his hand. He stood to attention in front of us and saluted and said with great seriousness, “Bonjour Commandant!”. We realised that the stick represented a gun. We looked at each other, confused and perplexed.

This event made me realise just how far wars and conflicts leave wounds and scars, both personal and collective. This little “soldier” was carrying the wounds of long years of warfare. This was all that society had been able to give him since his birth. In an innocent way, he was playing out a drama of traumatising which has affected his people, his family and his neighbours.

Living the mission of Christ today amongst people in conflict situations means being available day by day to people who are physically wounded: victims of torture and humiliation by soldiers, physical violence inflicted on innocent people, women and young girls raped, often in the presence of their family members, entire villages burnt by way of reprisal, people displaced and uprooted from their milieu who have lost their loved ones – husbands, wives, parents, children, brothers and sisters (this was the case with little Edward who saw his entire family killed) – or their most cherished possessions taken from them (houses and land).

Mission in such situations means an attentive presence which is creative and neither passive nor complacent. The missionary is the one who gives hope; he must be able to listen and have an attitude that will invite confidence from the wounded person. This is what Noel Perrot is doing with the displaced people at Lubumbashi and François Augustijns and François Numbi with the people of Kongolo. François Le Hellaye is doing likewise in the poor quarter of



Mbaza-Lemba in Kinshasa with his efforts at integrated development. At Lubumbashi in the Saint-Laurent quarter, Paul Venance is similarly engaged with basic communities.

From 2000 until the present, my own mission has been to support and encourage the confreres in their dedication and presence amongst the marginalized people. I have had two different kinds of reaction. On the one hand, I have been filled with joy and admiration at the devotion and zeal of these confreres, who give themselves body and soul, night and day to the service of these most abandoned people, risking their own lives in the process. I have learnt that when a Spiritan truly commits himself to the service of the poor, it is something very serious and involves a gift of his whole being. I think the Lord must be very happy to see the genuine dedication of our brothers to the suffering members of his body. The whole Congregation should take joy and pride in such an outstanding witness from their confreres.

On the other hand, it is humiliating to have such limited means in finance and personnel to support the confreres in their service of the most abandoned. In these circumstances, one realises that everything is grace; we have to rely on the goodness of God in all our undertakings. However, one thing is certain: in situations of conflict, where it is very difficult or impossible to make ends meet and provide the necessary for the missionary work of the confreres, the solidarity of the Congregation is a wonderful evangelical sign and an example of genuine missionary witness.

### **Concentrate on people and repair the broken ties**

Because of the war, there are certain areas of the Congo where the schools have not functioned (or hardly functioned) for the last 6 years. Without schooling, what is the future for these children who are the citizens of tomorrow? Remember that over a period of 6 years, young children complete their primary school, others their secondary school, others their university studies.

The conflicts and the ensuing wounds have broken or destroyed inter-personal relationships. Yet for the future of the country, to establish a real culture of peace, what is most important is

education. I have seen children sitting on the ground trying to study and at least learn something.

The tragic experience of the Congo has taught us that the most important thing is the human person. Education and formation in its different forms are very important areas for the missionary and prophetic commitment of Spiritans. The children of those who are waging war in the Congo are studying elsewhere in the best schools and the best universities available, while the children of the poor are not even able to complete their primary school. This is why we have decided to focus much of our energy on the service of the person, getting involved in education and on-going formation. It is the only way to help people to repair relationships which have been broken, both at the personal and community level. We have already started this work in Kongolo and we are going to start it at Manono at the level of primary and secondary school. One confrere is working with the diocesan team 'for a better world'.

## **Conclusion**

Living mission in a conflict situation is a challenge to our prophetic commitment as religious missionaries, who have been given the noble task of going to the help of the most abandoned. In the DRC, this means dressing wounds, re-establishing links that have been broken and helping people through education and formation. It demands an attentive and creative presence so as to be a sign of hope for the people of God.

# THE SITUATION OF CONFLICT AND POST CONFLICT IN SIERRA LEONE

*Gabriel Luseni*

*From his personal experience, Gabriel analyses the conflict in Sierra Leone, recounting the witness of many Spiritans who united with the people in a courageous Christian response towards rehabilitating the country. Ordained in 1988, Gabriel is a member of the WAP. He has been involved in pastoral and formation work and was Rector of the Spiritan Institute of Philosophy, Ghana. Gabriel is currently Provincial of the WAP.*

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In March 1991, a group of rebels from Liberia, calling themselves, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), invaded the Eastern and South Eastern part of Sierra Leone, a former British colony. This later developed into a full-scale civil conflict that lasted a decade. The nature and intensity of the war attracted world attention, and strong condemnation from the international community. It has been described in various terms; as primitive violence, genocide, an ethnic conflict, a blood- diamond conflict, and with some irony, a senseless war, etc. It is estimated that over 100,000 people lost their lives in the war, and double that number, were displaced into refugee camps within and outside the country.

## ***Analysis of the Conflict***

Since the 1967 controversial election and the intervention of the military in politics, the civil population had become critical of both the national army, and the post-colonial politicians, in the governance of the country. The army was now seen as a potential threat to national security, and democratic governance. The post-colonial Politicians became locked up in chronic patrician politics. From the very first day of the RUF invasion, there was loss of life. Then the rebels started a systematic force recruitment of people



including young boys and girls, into their ranks; thus the phenomenon of boy/ girl soldiers.

Economically, the rebels managed to break the backbone of the nation, by attacking and plundering the diamond mining economy, and by destroying the national infrastructures. It is also common knowledge that Mr. Charles Taylor of Liberia was, and remained the main supplier of arms and logistics to the RUF, in exchange for diamonds, right to the end of the Sierra Leone war.

Politically, the rebels caused anarchy, and made the country ungovernable. They set up their own government in the areas under their control. Their arms struggle spread to all parts of the country, including Freetown, the seat of government. The central government of Sierra Leone just crumbled as its citizens looked on hopelessly. The national army lost all credibility when it finally colluded with the rebels, and turned against the citizens it was set up to defend.

From the time of independence in 1961 to 1997, Sierra Leone had eight Heads of State. Between 1992 and 1997 alone, it had five Heads of State, and average of one a year, in four regimes, (APC, NPRC, SLPP, AFRC-RUF).

Socially, the Sierra Leone Conflict further divides the country, into rebels, and loyalist. The rebels were the RUF and the Renegade soldiers (the Westside Boys) with whom they collaborated to form the AFRC junta, under the chairmanship of Major Johnny-Paul Koroma. The loyalist were the Civil Defense Forces( the Kamajoors, the Kapras the Tamaboros, and the Donsos), the remnants of the regular sierra Leone army who refused to join the AFRC-RUF junta, and then the rest of the civil population.

The precise contribution of the Civil Defense Forces (made up of mainly the Kamojoors) to the Sierra Leone conflict is still to become clearer, perhaps at the International War Crime Tribunal, currently underway in Freetown. In general the civil population regarded the Civil Defense Forces as a counter force against the rebel invasion and occupation of the country. However the CDF too have now been

criticized, and even condemned for alleged excesses in dealing with their war opponents.

The role of the international community in the Sierra Leone conflict has been described by most observers as ambivalent. On the one hand the International community, especially the UN, the British Government, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), have been praised for helping to bring the war to an end. On the other hand, they have been criticized for turning a blind eye to the actions of some unscrupulous multi-national business and mercenary companies, who did diamond business in Sierra Leone throughout the war. Thus a conflict situation was turned into a lucrative diamond-for-gun and drug trade. By the time the war ended in 2001, it is estimated that over 70% of Sierra Leone's diamond wealth had been plundered.

### **Efforts to overcome the Aftermath of the Sierra Leone Conflict**

It is important, first of all, to recognize the fact that the Church too was a victim of the Sierra Leone conflict. Some missionaries were killed in the war by rebel forces. They include four Missionary of Charity Sisters, one Christian Brother, Br. Senan Kerrigan, a Spiritan, Fr. McAlyster, and a lay Dutch medical volunteer Dr. Ecko and his wife and child. Several nuns and clergy, including the Archbishop of Freetown of and Bo, Joseph Ganda were also taken into captivity by the rebels. The then Bishop of Kenema diocese, John O'Riordan, C.S.Sp, had to flee his house, and walk some five miles through the bush. A lot of Church property; schools, hospitals and clinics, transports mission houses and church building were either comprehensively looted or destroyed. The church has, so far, made no claims for financial compensations. Rather, it is seen as helping in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country.

### ***Efforts of the Spiritans***

The Spiritans always collaborate with the local Church wherever they are, in Evangelization and Humanitarian works. In the case of

the Sierra Leone conflict, they took up specific works of their own in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country during and after the war.

The Spiritan Regional Superior in Sierra Leone, Fr. Daniel Osei-Yeboah, tried to summarize the Spiritan efforts during the war, in the following statement to the Generalate in Rome in 2001:

“ As a result of the war, special needs, ranging from relief to personal care for the displaced refugees, are being given special attention. There are feeding programmes for displaced children, and formation programmes on peace and reconciliation. Youth work also takes up much of our time”. (SPIRITAN NEWS SPLASH, 10<sup>th</sup> February 2001, No. 54)

In 1993, the Archdiocese of Freetown and Bo asked Fr. Michael Hickey, C.S.Sp, to direct a UNDP (United Nations) rehabilitation programme for children affected by war (CAW) in Freetown. With the assistance of a Sierra Leone psychiatrist doctor, Dr. Matturi. Mick arranged classes and recreation for the boys and tried to gradually rehabilitate them and get them back to their family.

Fr. Brian Starken, C.S.Sp, was Development Officer for the Archdiocese of Freetown/Bo, and distributed a lot of emergency food aid from “Concern” etc., to the overcrowded refugee camps in Kissi, Waterloo, Bo, etc.

Fr. Daniel Osei-Yeboah, the Spiritan Superior also started a “Pre-school” for refugee children, who were given lunch from “CARE, and CRS food, and some teaching from volunteers.

Fr. Augustine Bayoh, worked full time, for two years, as Director of the Archdiocesan Development office in Bo. His office directed all the relief, and rehabilitation works in the Archdiocese.

Direct pastoral ministry in Small Christian Communities (SCC) in our Spiritan Parish of St. Martin's Freetown, was a meeting point for people trying to locate, or get some information about their displaced relations in Freetown. When new members attend the



weekly meetings, they always found a welcome and some help from the SCC.

This Christian confraternity also helped them to accept one another, and to cope with the aftermath of the war.

### **The Efforts of People**

On a grand scale the government of Sierra Leone, with the help of the International community, set up a National Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme to disarm and rehabilitate the fighters, and to resettle all war victims, and refugees.

But the biggest challenge for the people of Sierra Leone in the aftermath of the war was how to accept the rebels and the perpetrator of atrocities back into their communities. The cruelty of the war broke up families, set the young against civil authorities, and created enmity between people. So the road to reconciliation has been hard, but the people took it. Within a every short time they made tremendous efforts at reconciling differences. There is today in Sierra Leone, a renewed sense of patriotism, and collaboration among the people. The popular saying now in Sierra Leone, is not “how for do” but “one love”.

### ***Conclusion***

Finally, I believe that the solution to any potential conflict situation is in the prevention itself. Everything that needs to be done must be done to prevent the occurrence of direct conflict. These include, the removal of structures that necessitate conflict, the promotion of justice and human rights, and the fair distribution of natural and human resources. What happened in Sierra Leone in now part of its history, but can be a lesson to learn from by all.

## REFUGEE MINISTRY

### CASE STUDY: Kigoma Diocese-Tanzania

*Msilanga Vedastus Babu*

*The plight of refugees and our response as a Congregation is brought into stark focus by Vedastus, a member of the EAP. He was ordained in 1999 and has served as Assistant Provincial Superior of the EAP. Vedastus describes the situation of our five confreres working among the refugees in the camps of Kigoma and the kind of effective outreach we can accomplish as a Congregation. In spite of the abject conditions one feels the sense of a deeply Christian response, promising a glimmer of hope for the future. This is well echoed in the voice of the Hutu refugee who, after suffering horrific personal tragedy, is still able to say: "If I don't forgive, the war will never end".*

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#### **Being part of the solution**

There are as many ways of becoming a refugee as there are refugees themselves. Being displaced from their own land and residence, uprooted from their culture and disunited from their families, refugees are portrayed as those who lack what national citizens have.

A 28-year-old man shared with me how he became a refugee. One fine evening, he said, while the family had already gone to bed, he heard some bullet shots. He woke up his young brother and they both disappeared in the banana plantation for a hideout. The bullet shots became even louder. They started running, each taking an opposite direction. He was not sure whether or not the other members of the family also managed to leave the house. He ran as far as his already weak legs could carry him. Slowly he started losing his breath and he lost consciousness and collapsed.

Upon coming back to his senses, he found himself in the midst of many people. He was told to join the queue like others. He was

given a blanket and a plastic sheet of hard material. For shelter he was shown an open dusty place which he had to share with three other men whom he never met before. They were simply united by language and situation. They started putting up a shelter for themselves. He was a refugee!

## The Camps

Presently, there are 10 refugee camps in Kigoma Region with a population of over 350,000 refugees. Most of their refugees come from Burundi, though some are from Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Our confreres minister in three camps, namely: Mtabila I, Mtabila II and Myovozi. Others are: Nyarugusu, Lugusu, Kibondo, Mtendeli, Nduta, Mukungwa and Kanembwa. The three camps have a population of about 95,000 refugees. There are five confreres working in the area. Fr. Gervas Taratara (EAP), Fr. Paul Flamm, (USA-E), Fr. Fredrick Balou (PAC), Fr. Peter Mallya (EAP) and Br. Mariano Espinoza. (Paraguay)

Due to the regulations from United Nations High Commission for Refugees, (UNHCR) and the Tanzanian government, nobody except the registered refugee is supposed to live in the refugee camps. Our confreres live in a house about 4 kms from the camps. They go to the camps and come back home.

## Why are Spiritans in the Refugee Camps?

We decided to work with the refugees simply because of our commitment as a Congregation. The main pastoral activity that our confreres are pre-occupied with is presence and listening. There is also the pastoral activity of a sacramental nature with a lot of emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation. The ministry calls for constant self-giving. They see deprivation, misery, confusion, hopelessness and they listen to cries and a litany of material requests. The major shortcoming of the refugees is the fact that their future is not certain. Many of the refugees suffer from such a trauma and hence, the confreres spend most of their time listening



and counselling. They also teach religion and prepare the candidates for sacramental instructions.

The Confreres daily timetable runs from morning to late evening. The five Confreres live 130 kms away from Kigoma town. It takes a while before one reaches the place due to bad conditions of the road. The place is known as Nyakitonto. It is about 4 kms away from the camps where they minister. They have a house, which was built by the diocese but later on expanded by the Congregation. The ministry is tough but our confreres seem to like and enjoy it, for that is why they became Spiritans.

### Shortcomings

Apart from the joys that the confreres enjoy when working with the refugees, there are sometimes drawbacks and some shortcomings.

*The life situation of the refugees*, for instance, does make them reflect on the equality of people. Some are miserable to the extent of despairing. They look discouraged completely and for them, the future does not seem to hold any hope. Confreres have to spend hours to instil some hope in them.

*Language* is another drawback for the confreres. In the camps, the *lingua franca* is the Kirundi. French is also spoken wherever Kirundi does not work. Our confreres have to be conversant with Kirundi besides learning French or English depending on the confrere sent. They, however, cannot avoid learning Kiswahili, which is the National language of Tanzania, the country in which they work. Kiswahili is the first language that our missionaries learn whenever they come to work in East Africa, especially in Tanzania.

*Long-term hatred among the people:* Since the camps are composed of both the Tutsi and the Hutu, the problem of tribal hatred remains unresolved. Bitter memories take time to disappear. The Hutus are in the majority.

*Poverty among the people in the camp is rampant. When one becomes a refugee, one is never prepared to be one. One finds oneself a refugee without any extra pair of sandals, no extra shirt or toothbrush, to say the least. They are poorer than the prisoners who know that one day their term of imprisonment will come to the end except for those of life imprisonment. Our confreres listen to long cries of wanting material needs from the refugees. In such a situation, what do the confreres do? Theirs is the spiritual and not material richness. The only thing that the confreres have decided to do is to be part of the solution to the refugee problem.*

### **A Need for Reconciliation**

*"Being part of the solution"*

The problem of the refugee in Kigoma and probably elsewhere cannot be solved by an individual alone or by a group of people alone, or by the Church alone. The problem will only be solved if each one takes part in the solution. You and I have got to be part of the solution.

Mr. Mulokozi (38 years old) is a Hutu refugee, who literary saw his father being killed and the rest of the family dispersed. He still has fresh bitter memories of the tragedy. Having carefully listened to his story on how he became a refugee, I posed a question: *"Are you ready to forgive the people who killed your father and caused your family to disperse to-date?"* To my surprise Mulokozi looked at me through the eyes for a while, tears rolled down his cheeks, he gently looked at the wooden crucified Jesus on the cross then he started laughing. Amidst his laughter while more tears rolled down his cheeks he said, *"If I don't forgive, the war will never end."*

To me that was a powerful prophetic voice from a refugee. He is an individual who is ready to forgive for the life to continue. If everyone in Burundi, Rwanda, the Republic Democratic of Congo and elsewhere where we have refugees were like Mulokozi, then we would not have any more refugees!

## **The Future of the Ministry**

Our Spiritan confreres continue to advocate, with other pastoral agents such as Caritas Tanzania, Tanzania Episcopal Conference and the Burundian Episcopal Conference on behalf of the Refugee community. They keep on trying to persuade the Tanzanian Ministry of Home Affairs to permit the Refugees to return home gradually so as not to upset the delicate peace which has started prevailing in Burundi now. They also urge the Tanzanian government to assist the refugees who have been in Tanzania for about thirty or more years to be formally integrated into Tanzanian society if they so desire. In collaboration with the Burundian Episcopal Conference, our confreres ask the Burundian government to revise the Land laws so as to respect property rights for the refugees in exile for thirty or more years. The EAP is calling upon more members from other circumscriptions to come to our aid.

### **Any future for Spiritans working with refugees?**

Should the Burundian refugees be repatriated back home, and the others be naturalised into Tanzania, then the ministry to the refugees in Tanzania will come to the end. What then will the Spiritans working with refugees do? If that happens, shouldn't the Congregation open a Spiritan mission in Burundi so as to be able to work with the country destabilised by war? Won't this new mission in Burundi enable us to better bridge the gap between the community in exile and those who have remained behind? Won't this also help us to better address the root causes of the war and flight through justice and peace efforts? Or if it happens, should we simply forget about the whole ministry and answer to another call of the Spirit of the time?

All this calls for joint efforts. We, as a Congregation, ought to pull together and become part of the solution to the Refugee problem, not only in Kigoma-Tanzania, but to "the ends of the earth". (Mt.28: 20)

## MINISTRY TO AIDS VICTIMS

Festo Adrabo

*Caring for people with HIV/AIDS continues to be one of the greatest challenges for medical and pastoral care. Festo stresses the importance of bringing to the problem a holistic approach involving an interdisciplinary team. The singular contribution of the compassionate pastor poses a challenge for ministry in our time. Festo, who is a member of the EAP was ordained in 1986 and has been involved in pastoral work, administration, formation and hospital chaplaincy.*

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### HOW PEOPLE BECOME INFECTED AND THE CONSEQUENCES AND CHALLENGES IN UGANDA

1. Transfusion with contaminated blood
2. Transplantation of infected organs
3. Use of contaminated syringes
4. Sperm and Blood
5. Transmission from the mother to the un-born child.

N.B. The first cases of AIDS in Uganda date from the 1980s. AIDS soon became a domestic problem: many people were either infected or affected by the illness.

HIV/AIDS has become a social problem. Those infected have been stigmatised and discriminated against, often ending up ostracised by society. One often hears it said: "Your private life has been laid bare"!

HIV/AIDS has also become an economic problem: young people between 15 and 35, the fittest in society, have become the most vulnerable – often because poverty has led them into prostitution. Cultural practices, such as the re-marriage of widows and the



circumcision of young boys and girls, have made HIV/AIDS into an endemic sickness. People on the move, like lorry drivers making over-night stops in townships, have contributed to the spread of this condition.

N.B. The worst consequence is the ever-growing number of orphans, left in the care of their grandmothers. In the past, it was the children who buried the parents and grandparents; now, because of this pandemic, the contrary is the case. It is a terrible situation.

## **METHODS OF PREVENTION**

1. Every blood donation tested for HIV.
2. Educational programmes on the transmission of HIV – for example, the changing of attitudes.
3. An in-depth knowledge of the nature of HIV/AIDS.
4. Avoidance of practices which lead to the spread of the virus; e.g. multiple sexual partners.

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIV/AIDS AND OTHER INFECTIONS**

1. Age inversion: people no longer die in their old age as was previously the case.
2. HIV/AIDS is accompanied by other severe infections, such as diarrhoea, headache, severe fevers and other complications that increase weight-loss.
3. So far, there is no definitive treatment and this could last for a long time.
4. The stigmatisation and ostracisation that are associated with HIV/AIDS – as with leprosy in the past.
5. Death is long delayed – sometimes up to 15 years.

## **PASTORAL APPROACHES**

- Above all else, those involved in such ministry must avoid judgemental attitudes towards the victims. They must be compassionate and loving in their relations

with those infected of affected. "When a snake enters your house...". Today it is your turn; whose will it be tomorrow? HIV/AIDS does not make choices, nor does it observe any frontiers.

- For pastoral ministers to be effective, they must insist on a global approach in the way that care is given. They should obtain the help of doctors, nurses, dieticians and other specialists.

N.B. Many of the people affected by HIV/AIDS are well aware that there is no cure. What they look for from the ministers of the Church is somebody who will listen to their story. A sympathetic listener will often lead to the growth of a new relationship of the patient with God and help them to make plans for what will happen after their death. In all this, confidentiality is of extreme importance.

- I believe that the accompaniment of people suffering from HIV/AIDS must not cease with their death; ministering to the bereaved is part of the whole pastoral approach. Studies have shown that the mourning period for a widow can easily last for 3 to 4 years after the death of her husband. Obviously, this will also depend on the quality of the relationship they previously enjoyed.

## CONCLUSIONS

- People infected with HIV have rights which must be respected. They in their turn have the duty to avoid passing on the disease to other people. I mention this because I have often heard infected people saying, "I will not die alone"!
- Those who are infected should not be prevented from doing all that they are able to do for themselves. This is the principle of subsidiarity.
- Although the promotion of the use of condoms is an integral part of the policy of the Government and the AIDS Commission in Uganda, the President strongly

urges people to desist from all practices which carry a risk and promotes loving fidelity within the bonds of marriage.

- Throughout my ministry to victims of HIV/AIDS, I have never come across two cases which were exactly the same. All human suffering is unique, because every human being is unique and reacts to suffering in a very personal way.
- To finish, I would like to say that I look upon my ministry to HIV/AIDS victims as a great privilege, because gradually (and it is still going on) I am coming to understand the other side of human life. Secondly, it has been a privilege and a challenge because it is not every pastoral worker who has the chance to enter so intimately into the life of those in great difficulty.

#### **Definitions:**

***HIV: Human Immunology Deficiency Virus***

***AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome***

## New Commitments – Taiwan

Jean-Paul Hoch

*Ordained in 1978 and a member of the French Province, Jean-Paul was invited to the General Chapter as moderator; as the Chapter unfolded, he was elected the 23<sup>rd</sup> Superior General of the Congregation. In this contribution, delivered early on in the proceedings, he dwelt at length on the welcome he and his fellow workers 'of the first hour' were given when they arrived in Taiwan. He expresses gratitude for the many areas of support that the team experienced and continues to enjoy at this time of foundation. He reflects clearly and with optimism on the beginnings of the new engagement and affirms his hopes for the future of the Spiritan mission in Taiwan which, eventually, could produce interesting openings towards continental China. Ironically, it has now fallen to him and his Council to ensure that "these dreams will one day become a reality".*

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### 1) ***"Henceforth, you will be called..."***

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1998, in the company of Jean-Pascal Lombart, I set foot for the very first time on the continent of Asia. We joined two other confreres, Sean O'Leary and James Sandy, who had arrived several months before us in Taiwan. The next morning at breakfast, the bishop of Hsinchu, with a big smile, presented us with two bits of paper on which he had written, with his best paintbrush, our new names in Chinese. In no other country where I had been before did somebody have the idea of presenting me with a new first and second name! I have tried my best to interpret this episcopal gesture.

The first thing I saw in it was that we had been expected for a long time and that our arrival, like that of the other confreres, had been very well prepared. I refer you to Number 53 of INFORMATION/DOCUMENTATION of December 1996, for a description of the long and detailed preparation undertaken by the



General Council and Brian McLaughlin. This was a great help for our implantation in Taiwan: we knew where to go, what to do, and (which was no less important) who was going to pay! I take this opportunity to express sincere thanks to the bishop of Hsinchu, the General Council and the whole of the Congregation for the support we received from the first days of our arrival in Taiwan.

I also read into the gesture of new names the great desire of the bishop and the local Church that we should learn the terrible Chinese language as well and as quickly as possible. For our first two years in the bishop's house, the learning of the language was our principle occupation. Recently, in June of this year, we made an assessment of our first seven years in Taiwan and tried to lay down some guidelines for the future. We realised that even after 6/7 years of hard work, we still have a long way to go in our knowledge of the language, literature, history, culture and religion of the Taiwanese people. It needs more than a few weeks to learn the 5-6 thousand characters that are essential for ordinary reading. To give you some idea of the difficulty of the language, it is normally only after one year of the study of Chinese that one can even read the Mass, preaching lies way into the future. Having realised what a huge challenge it is to inculturate into the Chinese milieu, we thought it would be good to follow the policies of those Congregations which have been in this part of the world longer than ourselves – the Franciscans, Jesuits and Scheutists, for example. These Congregations send their young students to Taiwan long before ordination; they can then, after two years of intensive language-learning, do their four years of theology at the Catholic University of Taipei. In this way, after about six years of study on the spot, they will be much better equipped than we were for beginning their active ministry. They will have had time to assimilate the local culture, build a network of friends and get used to the realities of life in Taiwan. This is why, having set up a fund called “the OTP fund”, we have sent out invitations to various Foundations and Provinces of the Congregation to come and experience our project. If, as can easily happen, a young Spiritan finds during his OTP in Taiwan that he is not really cut-out for this kind of posting, nothing is lost if he then returns to his own Province. On the other hand, to break off a first appointment prematurely is always an unhappy

experience, both for the confrere concerned and for the community that receives him.

A third interpretation of the “new names” gesture also came to mind – perhaps less positive than the other two. Normally, a Chinese family name has only one syllable or character while the first name (which unlike other languages always comes second) generally has two. So if the name with which you were born is adorned with several syllables, the chances are that when you arrive in the country, the Chinese immigration officials will chop off one or more of them. Thus our Irish confrere, who arrived first in Taiwan, saw his surname “O’Leary” reduced to the one syllable “Li”, while his Christian name “Sean” was enriched with a second syllable. We were not in any way asked if we were happy with our new names and the characters that were given to express our new identity were only remotely connected to our real names. It is all a bit frustrating! It is as if we are being told that what interests our Chinese hosts is not what we were before we came to Taiwan but rather what henceforth we can be for them. It is a question, as the psalmist puts it, of forgetting the house of your father and mother. If a person comes to Taiwan with the idea of living mission according to the exclusive model of an exchange between Churches or cultures, he will almost certainly be very disappointed. A young confrere, recently ordained in his local Church, who has just lived through the exciting and inspiring days of his first Masses, becomes once more, on arrival in Taiwan, a simple student – not a prestigious student studying for some sort of doctorate but a simple beginner in the study of the Chinese language. The Catholic Church in Taiwan is far too small (about 1.5% of a population of 23 million) for the role of a priest to be one of prestige. Moreover, apart from Sunday Masses that he can celebrate in English for the lively and dynamic Christian communities of young workers from the Philippines, the young confrere will have almost no other opportunity for a long time to carry out a significant ministry amongst the Chinese community. Added to this, although the Taiwanese are quite used to Americans and Europeans, the same cannot be said for Africans. In our town of Hsinchu, you see very few Africans in the streets, so it calls for a certain detachment and a large amount of patience to put up with the initial reactions of

curiosity that they are bound to meet. Solid relationships have to be built up slowly, based on deep and authentic personal values

## **2) “Every family has a book that is difficult to read”**

As other contributors will be treating the subject of international community life on July 1<sup>st</sup>, I will not say much about our community life at this time. There is a Chinese saying, that in the small library of each family, there is one book that is not easy to read – in other words, every family has its problems. Our community, like all others, international or otherwise, is not without its tensions, trials and sudden departures. In our evaluation meeting to which I have already referred, this was one of the topics for reflection. We recognised the crucial importance of the early days of residence in Taiwan, and the fact that an initial difficulty in adapting does not necessarily mean that a confrere is not suitable for the life and mission of Taiwan. Of the five Spiritans currently in the country, four are on first appointment and only one is of an earlier generation; all are agreed that this does not make for an ideal equilibrium. The problem will inevitably solve itself in a few years, as the younger confreres grow older and slip into middle age. So we have to be patient!

I have also come to appreciate the fact that what makes for the solidarity and viability of a community is not just the good intentions that we have towards each other, nor a shared apostolic enthusiasm, but also a readiness by all to follow our *Rule of Life* as well as possible. If our interpretations and practice of the *Rule of Life* are too divergent, what sort of community life can we expect to have? Each one has to remind himself frequently that the community is not “everybody expect myself” but “everybody *including* me”! I hope these few remarks will not give the impression that the Taiwan community is undergoing special problems: it is simply a community that is building itself up with patience and hope.

## **3) “We give preference to those places where the Church has difficulty in finding workers” (SRL 12).**

If I were a bishop with Spiritans working in my diocese, this is the part of their *Rule of Life* that I would quote to them most frequently!



When the time came, at the completion of our two years of learning Chinese, when we had to decide what ministries we would undertake, we had several meetings with the bishop and his Vicar General, explaining to them the main lines of our spiritan charism but, at the same time, assuring them of our openness to their suggestions as long as they did not involve too much dispersion of the group. It seemed to us that having just arrived in the diocese, we should adopt an attitude of openness and availability. The diocesan authorities were very understanding and the ministries that they confided to us seem to be in conformity with the basic orientations of the Congregation. For reasons that were dictated more by practical considerations than theory, we were generally replacing other priests who had left or were about to leave their ministries. We were given the following responsibilities:

Sean O'LEARY is diocesan chaplain to prisons, which he visits regularly with a team of lay people and sisters. He is also chaplain in a house for young people in difficulty, which is run by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. This is where he lives, mixing with the young people above all in the evening when they return from school. He takes part in the educational meetings with the sisters and staff. He also serves the Anglophone community, mostly made up of workers from the Philippines who attend the parish of the Holy Spirit.

Jean-Pascal LOMBART is chaplain to the diocesan team for youth work and responsible for ministry to students in the town of Hsinchu. He also looks after the residence of the inter-diocesan junior seminary with 15-20 students. He has a very heavy workload.

As regards myself, I am responsible for the parish of the Holy Spirit, along with an annex which is called St. Michaels. I am helped by a Taiwanese catechist and a Korean sister. I also have a second Mass each day and preach occasional retreats for a near-by community of sisters. The parish house serves for the moment as the spiritan centre.

In the near future, Jean-Pascal DIAME, who is about to complete his two years of language study, will take over a



parish close to that of the Holy Spirit for two or three years while continuing to attend language courses. After that, he may take up a ministry, along with another confrere, with the aboriginal people of the island.

#### **4) *Our dreams for the future...***

Apart from the four confreres I have already mentioned, another from the Province of Portugal is here with us at the Chapter as a translator – Vitor Narciso Martins da SILVA. He has just successfully completed his first year of Chinese. At the end of the year, we will be joined by a confrere from the Province of USA West, LUONG Duc Gia, whose parents are still living in Vietnam.

As the number of confreres continues to grow, we may be able to bring some of the dreams we have been having to fruition:

- We would like to open a second community, either in our present diocese or in another, with a view to diversifying our implantation and the type of ministry we are undertaking;
- We want to get involved in ministry to the aboriginal peoples;
- We hope that a confrere could specialise in dialogue with Buddhism. But Buddhism is a “religion” at least as rich and complex as Christianity, so it would involve a long period of preparation before somebody could “enter into dialogue” with Buddhism;
- We would love to be able, somehow or other, to cross the straits of Taiwan to help the Church in mainland China;
- We are convinced that our Congregation will never be really and lastingly present in the Chinese world until young Chinese have joined our Congregation to share in our mission. So we want to welcome young Chinese or Taiwanese into our family, although we realise that the local Church is currently producing very few vocations;
- We would like to make our Congregation and our spirituality better known to the Christians of Taiwan. We have already printed a small booklet about our religious family and we

are currently translating, with the help of a Taiwanese lady, the book entitled "You have laid your hand on me". We have reason to believe that the deep spirituality of François Libermann could touch the hearts of the Taiwanese, especially in these times when so many of them are worried about the future, torn between the traditional world which is gradually disappearing and a "modernity" which can only bring material goods; they are looking for a peace and happiness which is deeper than anything a consumer society can provide.

We rely on your continuing support and prayers to make these dreams become a reality in the future.

# THE JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF THE OLDER PROVINCES

Peter Marzinkowski

*Faced with the difficulties of the older provinces in a secularized Europe and of Germany in particular, Peter Marzinkowski, until recently the Provincial of Germany, refuses to give in to discouragement, despite a chronic shortage of vocations. He looks to the scriptures to try to discern God's plan for the future and our role in it. For him, the future of Spiritan mission in Europe will have to rise above former national structures to that of shared communities which can help the provinces in this area to find a new inspiration. Since he wrote this presentation, Peter has been appointed bishop of the new diocese of Alindao in the Central African Republic.*

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When I returned in the year 2000 to my province of origin (Germany) after a long absence, I felt like a stranger in my own country. Neither society nor the Church were as they had been. I no longer understood the language. I had also changed. To agree to take over the animation of a Province that I no longer knew and whose recent history was unknown to me seemed to be foolhardy.

But I tried to live in faith the first three years of my mandate of steering the Province of Germany. The Spiritan year of 2002/2003 gave a new breath of life to the whole Province; we celebrated the jubilee year with great joy.

At the Provincial Chapter that brought the Spiritan year to a close, we tried to make an assessment according to the "operation truth" proposed by the Superior General as a guide for the year.

- We wanted this provincial Chapter to be an expression of our faith in the kingdom of God, our love for the Congregation and our trust in the strength of the Holy Spirit who makes all things new;

- As we had done in Africa and Latin America, we tried at the Chapter to analyse the signs of the times, the joys and the challenges for our Province, taking the word of God as our starting point.

We chose a small episode from the life of the prophet Elijah on Mount Horeb, which took place after a long period of drought. King Ahab asked Elijah to pray for rain (I Kings 18: 42-44).

“Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel and prostrated himself on the ground, his face between his knees. He said to his servant, ‘Go up and look in the direction of the sea’. He did so and said, ‘There is nothing there’. Seven times, Elijah told him to return. On the seventh occasion, the servant said: ‘I can see a little cloud, the size of a man’s fist, coming out of the sea’. Elijah said to him, ‘Go up and tell Ahab to set off now before the storm blocks his route’.

There are six moments in this story that are significant for us:

1. *The drought.* Many of us had experienced this in Africa, for example, and knew what it meant: drought can lead to death. But we also know what drought can mean in the spiritual life and in the life of our Province.
2. *Waiting – an active waiting.* “Elijah climbed up, prostrated himself, his face between his legs”: He interrupts his normal life and begins something else – he prays. Psychologists interpret ‘his face between his knees’ in a different way: according to them, it can mean to be completely at ease, turned in on oneself, inverted. Thus it could mean that he can feel something new and opens himself up to it.
3. *Elijah knows where to look* to discover the new thing. It does not just come from anywhere – it comes from the sea. In order to see it, one has to climb to the top of the mountain because from there one can see a long way.
4. *Elijah knows that patience is needed*, the rain does not come quickly. Seven times he asks his servant to return and climb.
5. And finally, what does he see? *He sees something small and insignificant* – a little cloud, the size of a man’s fist.



6. *Elijah sends his servant* to Ahab. It is the young one who becomes active, who passes on the message to start off at once.

## Drought

In the German Province, we feel we are experiencing a very long drought. The concrete reality of our society makes us shudder and could easily push us to despair. We are experiencing a serious spiritual crisis, marked by a secularisation which also affects vocations to the priesthood and religious life. At present, we have only 5 confreres under 50, including 2 Croats, and 4 between 50 and 60, including one bishop. But what is most worrying is that the youngest are the most fragile and cannot, in the present circumstances, take on positions of responsibility. It is little consolation to know that the case is the same for all religious orders in Germany and all the Spiritan provinces of Europe.

The whole of Europe is currently going through an economic and social crisis. The West European model of capitalism, with its combination of a liberal market economy and a socialist State, is becoming outmoded. The globalisation process is producing an ever-larger gap between the smaller groups which are getting richer and those social classes which are progressively poorer and marginalized in Europe.

The two main Churches (Catholic and Protestant) are both experiencing a major crisis. About 100,000 people are leaving the Church each year and the number of baptisms is diminishing. There is an ever greater diminishing of faith; from this flows a great reduction in the taxes that go to the Church.

Such a sociological change inevitably has repercussions for employees and finance in general. On the one hand there is a diminution in the number of religious and priestly vocations, on the other there are dioceses which are in great need. The situation in Berlin is catastrophic: more than 440 full-time employment contracts have been revoked, formation centres and even churches have been closed. Other dioceses, such as Aachen, and Hamburg, are experiencing similar difficulties.

Even Cologne, which is considered to be one of the richest dioceses in the world, has had to cut back 90 million euros in its provisional budget for 2005!

The situation has similar effects on religious orders - less donations, less contracts which bring in money for living expenses. Meanwhile, the contributions to be paid for health and old age insurance and the daily cost of living continue to rise. It is a dark picture of drought.

This drought is also a challenge: do we just leave things as they are or have we a role to play in this grave situation in Germany?

### **We have arrived at the second moment – an active waiting.**

What impresses me is the way that Elijah waits. Like him, we are trying to “put our faces between our knees” to reflect - with the Provincial Council, with the Superiors of other Congregations and, above all, with the 10 Spiritan provinces of Europe – on what our mission is today. A feeling of fragility must not prevent us from continuing our commitment. But we have to redirect our commitment, looking for new initiatives without neglecting our duty to the confreres, especially the elderly (cf. SRL 10)

### **Third moment: Elijah knows where to look: rain comes from the sea**

We are lacking many things: where will help (the rain) come from? We have almost no vocations to religious life, but there are lay people who want to work, pray and live with us, who feel attracted by our spirituality. At Pentecost, 2002, we celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the movement “Missionaries for a time”. On this occasion, hundreds of young people who had had this experience of living in Spiritan communities in different cultures testified to its value and expressed a desire to live their Christian lay vocation more conscientiously in the service of the Kingdom of God. So Pentecost 2002 was a joyful feast for we Spiritans.

In the course of the Spiritan year, we organised a joint retreat for professed and lay Spiritans; together we discovered the riches of our first founder, Claude François Poullart des Places.

Lay Spiritans are directing some of our works, like NOTEL (a first aid service for drug users) and the HGG (the College of the Holy Spirit at Würselen). The MaZ project in Stuttgart is run by a community of lay Spiritans and professed confreres from Germany and Tanzania. Some administrative posts in the administration of the Province are confided to competent and qualified lay people: the Procure, the Secretariat...

#### **Fourth moment: seven times the servant had to return**

Elijah knows how to wait...patience is needed! We feel everything should move fast. Sometimes, I would like to have the calmness and serenity of Elijah. He waits and prays while his servant sounds out the situation. Where can we give more responsibility to others? To lay people? To confreres from the South? It is a challenge, but this challenge is faced up to with a positive vision for the future.

Fifth moment: 'I can see a little cloud, the size of a man's fist, coming out of the sea'

Whoever has no vision of the future cannot conceive of what the future will bring. We are convinced that, despite our present fragility, we still have a prophetic mission in Europe and that we can help to build the Kingdom of God in this continent inspired by the charism of our founders. For the last 7 years, the European Provinces have been trying to discern together some missionary projects for Spiritans in Europe (PMSE). These are pastoral commitments which correspond to the criteria of the Spiritan vocation and the charism of our founders. Our missionary presence in such projects would be a prophetic sign in the Church of Jesus Christ in Europe, whether this is through the type of difficult work that we take on or the witness of the life we share in international and intercultural communities. This is why we want confreres from other continents to share in these projects: they help to project a significant Spiritan presence in a world that is too often torn apart by racism. Such projects (PMSE) could eventually become solid bases for a new regional structure in Europe, while the former structures of independent provinces gradually disappear.

As regards Germany, we have so far chosen three projects for the PMSE list:

- The intercultural community of Rostock, providing different pastoral ministries in Mecklembourg, an area of first evangelisation;
- The intercultural community of Stuttgart (professed and lay people) with the MaZ project: it provides a platform for intercultural exchange and dialogue in the service of the European Church;
- The mixed and intercultural community of Broichweiden; through its college and youth work, it forms missionaries for a society that is almost totally secularised, with few valid ethical values.

I am convinced that something new ('the little cloud') is happening in Germany and in Europe through the Spiritan regional structure and its PMSE, and that this innovation will develop by

- an ever greater mutual help and sharing of responsibility of our collaborators and the Spiritans;
- the encouragement of intercultural and international Spiritan communities which will take charge of the PMSE.

### **Sixth moment: launch out into the deep**

In embarking on these new ventures, we are certainly taking risks. It is a challenge but such steps give a feeling of joy to our older confreres, who can feel that after they have gone, Spiritan life will continue and that a Spiritan presence in Europe makes a great deal of sense. There are some religious congregations in Germany which have decided not to accept any more young candidates, saying that it would be irresponsible to take young people into a community which is too old and tired and could never give them the necessary encouragement. We do not go along with this attitude. We believe that our intercultural communities can welcome young people who are searching for their vocation and that it would be an introduction



into this type of intercultural formation that prepares for the future (SRL 141).

It is precisely because our Congregation is international that we can provide the Church in Europe with an opportunity; we can help to ensure that this grace becomes visibly operational in Germany. This is a source of great joy for us.

Elijah sends his servant as a messenger. It is he who transmits, who becomes active, who casts out into the deep. What is important for the coming of the Kingdom in this secularised society of Europe is not the old Spiritan structures in such or such a country, but the presence of a prophetic and missionary Congregation which believes that the charism of its founders can be of service to our society in discovering renewal and values which are life-giving.

# JOYS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE SPIRITAN MISSION IN FRANCE

Christian Berton

*In times past, France was the great supplier of personnel for overseas mission, but today, she is trying to discern the priorities for the future in the face of the crisis that has hit all the European provinces. If the future ultimately belongs to God and God alone, it is nevertheless up to men and women to try to trace out the paths to be followed. Christian Berton was ordained in 1978. He has been Provincial in France and is now a member of the General Council. Despite our present weaknesses, Christian looks forward to the future with courage.*

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During the celebrations for the Spiritan Year, we received a great welcome and understanding from the local Churches. We felt how much the Churches were grateful for our missionary work throughout the world but also for the help we give in the dioceses. This made us very happy but we also understood that we must prepare well for the future.

## 1 The Joys

### 1.1 Listening to new calls

In recent years, the French bishops have had no hesitation in turning to our Congregation to ask us to take charge of certain pastoral areas. We have been able to give a positive response to some of these in Strasbourg and the Parisian region. Next September, a new community will be started in the southern suburbs of Paris. The main criterion we follow is for a presence in areas where poor people are living, often the descendants of immigrants. I think the bishops approach us for two reasons:

- They are lacking priests. A few decades ago, they would not have turned to religious orders as they are doing today;

- They know of our missionary experience and our ability to work in pastoral areas with a largely immigrant population.

The Province has also replied to the call of Justice and Peace. It has tried to get involved in two principle ways:

- By creating a greater awareness in the communities. Gradually, confreres are coming to realise that work for Justice and Peace is a constituent part of our mission. Some confreres are involved in groups which are struggling for greater justice and peace. These works are not always well known but they show a willingness to fight against the inequalities which are undermining society and which can eventually lead to wars.
- At the structural level, confreres have been appointed to national organisations, such as AEFJN and ACAT.

## 1.2 A shared mission

There is no longer a question of being a “lone ranger” in mission: the Province realises that it must collaborate with others.

It is getting help from about 20 confreres from other circumscriptions, 14 of which are quite young. They come from Angola, EAP, FANO, Nigeria, PAC and Poland. They are sharing the work with enthusiasm and efficacy. By preference, they are posted to communities which are working close to the priorities of the Province – OAA, intercultural communities, work with migrants...

It goes without saying that they need time to adapt to the realities of French society and the local Church. Integration is much easier for those who have done their theology in France. The Province would not be able to continue its mission at home without their help. The international communities give a fine witness, despite the difficulties that can arise from time to time.

We are also discovering the joys of sharing works and posts of responsibility with lay people. Some are Associates, others are not. They are helping in the Oeuvre d'Auteuil and with the revues. They are involved in the running of communities (bursars) and the

welcoming of groups into our houses. They bring skills that are not necessarily shared by confreres and open up our communities to a new style of Spiritan presence in France.

The Province continues to share the means it has available with other Congregations and organisations:

- It works with organisations which send young “cooperants” abroad to work for a limited period. We need more confreres to help in preparing young people for this work.
- Regarding vocations work, we are trying to work together with other apostolic religious Congregations. Recently, the JEM network, “Jeunes en Mission” has become inter-Congregational.

### 1.3 A Spiritan spirituality

The celebration of the Spiritan Year was a great occasion for the Province of France. A remarkable exhibition was set up which travelled around the Province, thanks to the individual communities.

- The confreres renewed themselves, personally and at the level of the community. There were lectures, retreats, and pilgrimages. They deepened their familiarity with Spiritan spirituality by returning to the sources of Poullart des Places and François Libermann.
- Confreres organised symposia, expositions, and conferences. Some dioceses reacted favourably to suggestions made by the Province: for example, the diocese of Rennes decided to have a “Year of Poullart des Places”.

## 2 The Challenges

### 2.1 Understanding the specific mission of the Province of France.

Not so long ago, missionary work was synonymous with the specific work of missionary Congregations or “Fidei Donum” priests. But we have now reached a point where one sometimes hears it said that



mission is everywhere; this way of talking carries the risk of some confusion in our Province.

Is there a specific missionary work for the Spiritans of the Province of France? What is it? Where is it? Our reply to these questions is crucial if we wish to offer something to the Church.

It leads some confreres to ask:

- Is it still relevant to send confreres to other continents?
- Have we a missionary role in the Church in France?
- What is the point of taking on new works in Europe? Will we be able to sustain them?

For some time now, the Province has been responding to precise requests, but it can entail a risk of dispersion. Some feel we are excessively disengaging from some Spiritan circumscriptions where many confreres have worked all their lives.

What is at stake here is our solidarity with the rest of the Congregation. What are the priorities in the light of which we will express this solidarity, both at the level of confreres and the finance that a new undertaking may entail? Moreover, are the missionary priorities of the Province sufficiently clear and motivating for us to be able to count on the solidarity of other circumscriptions?

## 2.2 How can we adapt to the requirements of society?

Such demands are valid at all times and in all continents, but we are experiencing greater pressure today because of certain new factors:

- More and more, we are working alongside people who are specially trained in their area to a very high level. This is particularly so in the field of education. In the Oeuvre d'Auteuil, Spiritans are meeting people who have undergone a long training and built up great experience in the approach to disturbed children. My experience is that working in this sphere supposes a great vigilance if we are to work efficiently, either in the interior life of the houses (chaplaincies, taking part in the house councils) or in the management of such an important work.

- Providing a proper care for older confreres is a constant concern, but the Province must conform to the exigencies of the administration. The evolution of laws is not always easy to follow and we sometimes find ourselves in a state of confusion. But it is clear that what was acceptable 25 years ago is no longer so today. On the one hand, we want to make their retirement a happy one. But there can be financial considerations. Aid from the State will not be forthcoming unless we conform to the conditions it lays down.
- The same applies to our houses which receive guests. Here also there are directions to be followed which can involve expensive works of renovation and modernisation.
- The Province realises the importance of communications as a means of spreading missionary awareness. This is another area where we must adapt, so that we can present the sort of message that is often stifled by the powerful and omnipresent media.

### 2.3 How should our patrimony be administered?

The Province has a large patrimony inherited from the past, particularly in houses which were used for training missionaries before their first appointment. A few years ago, the question was raised in a meeting of the European Provincials: what are we going to do with these buildings?

- They need personnel to assure their upkeep, but the Province no longer has people available or competent for such a work. It involves a lot of expense. What can we do? To turn them into houses of welcome for various groups is not easy – nor is it always opportune, because some are way out in the country.
- The last provincial Chapter asked the Council to look at our buildings in France, “to make a list of houses that we will need”. As regards the opening and closing of communities, the criteria listed in SRL 25.1 will be borne in mind.

Eventually, the map of our Spiritan presence in France will undergo considerable change.

- This exercise must take into account the historical nature of some houses through their links with our founders.

## Conclusion

The theme of our last Provincial Chapter in 2003 was “Turned towards the future”. We have to be present in a changing world, despite the diminution of our numbers and our other weaknesses. To achieve this, it seems to me to be important to “deepen our Spiritan identity” (Provincial Chapter message), in order to discern better what we can do in collaboration with others and to live together the solidarity of the Congregation.

# THE PROVINCE OF IRELAND CONFRONTS ITS CHALLENGES WHILE COUNTING ITS BLESSINGS

Pat Palmer

*Pat is a member of the Irish Province. He was ordained in 1976 and spent many years working in the WAP. His principal responsibilities have been Director of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle Formation in Ireland and Novice Master in the WAP. Pat is currently Provincial Superior of the Irish Province. In his presentation on the joys and challenges facing the Irish Province, he presents important insights into the relationship between the church and society in Ireland. Despite repeated images of the fall in religious practice, compounded by a questioning of the relevancy of the Church, the seeds of a new spring are evident in the growing interest in spirituality and a genuine concern for living authentic values; a challenge surely to renew vigour within a changing Congregation in the Irish Province.*

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The number one challenge for the Provinces of the Northern Hemisphere is to see the Holy Spirit at work in our Provinces and in our history and to accept what the Spirit is asking of us now. This is not easy as we seem to be facing death, some quicker than others; if this is so, is this what the Spirit wants of us? If it is not what the Spirit wants then we must ask what is it that we are not doing or not doing right. We have to ask ourselves if our work is done. But the immediate answer to that is no; when we look at Europe today, the need for evangelization, for preaching the Good News, has rarely in history been more urgent. If we are not called to do this as a Congregation then who is? Is it part of our charism or has our charism in this part of the world come to an end?

Interpreting theologically what is happening around us is a great need for us and for the Church of the old world.



But we also have to see ourselves as part of society and as part of the whole Church. A religious Congregation does not exist for itself or on its own. It is influenced by the world around it, sometimes too much, while its influence on the world is often hard to see.

The situation of the Congregation in Ireland mirrors the situation of the Church in Ireland. It has moved from a situation where the Church was very highly regarded and closely identified with the State to a situation where respect for the Church has dropped as has adherence to religious practice. Vocations are at an all time low especially to missionary groups. There are many reasons for this; the usual ones of secularisation, newly acquired affluence, as well as scandals in the Church, greater choice in lifestyle and profession and a decline in religious faith.

However while many people no longer attend Church regularly, especially young people, there is a real interest in prayer and spirituality, a genuine desire among many people to be helped to know God and to be offered an alternative to continual materialism and consumerism.

The “official” and “institutional” Church does not attract people; at times young people seem to have an almost pavlovian reaction to anything “Church”. The challenge then is to find another way to reach out to them and in some way empower them to bring alive the faith which we believe they are offered. Religious by their very charism are in a position to do this. Religious can adapt to situations which the institutional Church cannot do so easily.

This is the situation in which the Congregation finds itself in Ireland. It would be wrong to assume that there is an air of despondency because of the difficulties we face. I believe that it is a sign of the presence of the Spirit that our confreres still carry on their ministry with a sense of joy and trust despite the difficulties and challenges.

## Our Joys

1. To witness the fruition of so many of the missions where our people have worked for over a 100 years. The fruit is seen in the strong Churches of the developing world, the vocations to the diocese and to our Congregation and to see some of these confreres come to Europe to assist us in our work here. We in Ireland as in many other provinces have already benefited from the presence of African confreres working here with us.

2. To be part of a freer, more human community, having left in the past many of the customs and beliefs which repressed and oppressed rather than liberated and developed the person. Authoritarianism was not just found in politics but also in the Church. One of the fruits of Vatican 2 is the humanisation of religious life.

3. To see older confreres fully involved in the ministry and making a real contribution still. No other profession can do this. Of course, this can be seen in a negative way also; are we propping up a system which is collapsing anyway. But part of the charism of Spiritans, I believe, is the way we relate to people. This is often commented on and it is why bishops like to have Spiritans working in their dioceses.

4. To see greater openness to collaboration with the laity and to see the growth of Spiritan Associates in the Congregation. I do not believe that we should try to control or organise this development too much. It is something new which should be allowed to grow according to its own dynamics.

5. To be able to benefit from the renewal of spirituality and prayer life, the new ideas which have broken out of the narrow categories of the past and help us to improve our prayer life. Allied with this is the fidelity of so many confreres to their vocation and ministry.

6. To see the increasing cooperation between the Provinces of Europe; a definite movement towards a more regional structure here.

7. To witness the success of new initiatives in Ireland particularly those reaching out to asylum-seekers and immigrants. The new initiatives of SPIRASI (CCTS) which caters for the needs of asylum-seekers, of the Education Awareness Office which focuses attention on such issues as suicide, bullying, harmony in the home, addiction and of Newlands Counselling Centre. The very active Justice and Peace group in the Province is a sign of hope.

## Our Challenges

1. We are a declining and, maybe, dying group: how do we maintain morale among confreres who see few if any young confreres coming after them? Some of the older confreres find it hard to accept the change in the image of the Church in Ireland.

2. The challenge of vocations: if we believe that God calls people, how then do we reach out and how do we bring alive these vocations? This involves building up a person's faith and his willingness to trust in something greater than himself. There are also real social issues involved in this: smaller families, greater affluence, the influence of peers.

3. Despite declining numbers we still receive requests for help in various missions and within our own country. But we are increasingly unable to respond to them.

4. The sadness of seeing some of our younger members leaving. This is a phenomenon common to most groups and to dioceses. The reasons given for leaving have to do with the image of priesthood and also with celibacy. Other confreres find it hard to settle in a mission or to a work

5. One of the greatest challenges is to plan for the future of the Congregation in Europe. Some of the Provinces are reaching crisis

point in terms of numbers and their ability to maintain their communities and their works. Do we ignore this or do we try to devise a strategy to ensure that in some way our apostolates will continue in Europe. The European Provincials have been working towards developing a policy which involves prioritising our works, cooperating at the level of personnel and inviting confreres from circumscriptions outside Europe to join us.

6. Perhaps our greatest challenge in Ireland is to renew our religious life and to make it once again a sign of hope and inspiration for our people.



## JOYS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE SPIRITANS OF THE UNITED STATES EAST

James McCloskey

*In his outline of “ageing trends” in the United States East, James describes how a Province now weighted down by age, still makes a valuable contribution to the missionary outreach of our younger circumscriptions. There is also a commitment to work among some disadvantaged communities in the States, while a number are engaged in formation, education and relief services. James was ordained in 1980. He was engaged in pastoral ministry in Paraguay and New York. He was Headmaster of Holy Ghost Preparatory School, Bensalem and has been Vice President for University Relations at Duquesne University. James was Provincial Superior of United States East, a position which he held until his election as a member of the General Council at the Chapter of Torre d’Aguilha.*

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The title of this brief reflection is “Older Provinces: Joys and Challenges.” And there are many synonyms or word associations for the term “older.” “Venerable” may be a fit substitute. “Learned in wisdom” might be another. “Archaic” might be a third term. Or even “decrepit” might serve as an apt description. I will choose the phrase “ageing with grace” – and hope that it is an accurate one. There are “ageing trends” that are applicable to each of the provinces represented on this panel. The most obvious, and in some ways dramatic, is that of declining membership, dearth of new candidates, and the effects (in mentality and energy) of an ageing membership. I cite, as an example, the situation of the United States Province East.

At its height, in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, the United States Province numbered close to 350 members – excluding candidates. The province staffed and maintained its own seminaries (at every level), a number of secondary schools, many parishes, a major university, various social ministries (such as a centre for homeless

children in Philadelphia) and an active missionary presence in East Africa and Puerto Rico.

These are our current statistics: there are now 67 members whose province of origin is the United States Province East. Of these 67 members, 25 are “technically” active. The remaining confreres are formally retired. Included among the 25 active members are two confreres whose ages are 91 and 85 years respectively. There are no candidates at any level of formation for the United States Province East. In the eight-month period preceding the General Chapter, eight confreres died – on average, one death each month. These demographic trends, and other factors, contribute to a certain and definable heaviness in the Province. Resources and pastoral attention are necessarily devoted to the care of the elderly and infirm. The clergy sexual abuse crisis in the United States, as well, has contributed to a fearfulness and malaise on the part of many members. A fractured relationship between American clergy and bishops has been a further unfortunate result of this crisis. The challenges of the Province are not few.

Given this “heavy” context, the stamina and missionary energy of the province is clear and strong. We continue to maintain an active presence in the Provinces of East Africa, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Puerto Rico. A younger American confrere is engaged in refugee ministry in Tanzania. Still another will depart soon for the new Spiritan regional initiative in the Dominican Republic. Our continued commitment to the African American communities in Harlem, New York, and Dayton, Ohio is strong. The ministries of two of our confreres at Catholic Relief Services in Baltimore, Maryland, are especially meaningful to us.

Perhaps the most significant “change” that we have experienced is one of self-definition. The circumstance of declining membership and age has been offset by a rising international presence of Spiritans in the Province. The demographics of this trend are equally telling. In addition to the 67 members of the province, there are 18 members “appointed” to the province from other circumscriptions, including two first appointments from Haiti and the West Africa Province. These confreres, from Africa, Europe, and the Caribbean are pastors, teachers, counsellors, and missionaries – some to immigrant communities in the eastern United States. Our

sense of self is being necessarily transformed to a mindset that is more expansive, creative, inclusive, and collaborative.

Especially important is the presence of 17 Spiritans who are pursuing advanced degrees in the United States Province East. These confreres from the Provinces of Africa and Haiti (9 at Duquesne University, 3 at Fordham University, 2 at Catholic University of America, 1 at Notre Dame University, 1 at Marquette University, and 1 at Loyola University) undertake programs in theology, philosophy, business, counselling, communications, and educational administration. Their contributions to their Provinces in years to come will be formidable.

A typical example of internationality in the Province might be enlightening, namely, the case of the formation community at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. Second cycle candidates reside in a parish, within the jurisdiction of the United States Province East, comprised of African American, Haitian, and Latino parishioners. There are five Spiritan candidates: one from the province of Haiti, one from Tanzania, and three Vietnamese students from the United States Province West. The Director of formation is a member of the Trans-Canadian Province, the pastor of the parish is from the United States Province West, and two Spiritan members of the faculty are from the provinces of Nigeria and England. The Duquesne University communities are composed of members from eight national groups, living, working, and studying together.

The pace of change in self-identity has been rapid for us. We are encouraged by the Spiritan direction of our educational institutions, particularly Duquesne University. The creation of the Centre for Conflict Resolution, and the two proposed centres of Spiritan Catholic Social Thought and Spiritan Spirituality are unique contributions to the Spiritan identity of the institution. In many ways, we are more conscious of Spiritan identity now than we have ever been. We feel strongly, and with unanimity, that the resources of the University for the advancement of Spiritan mission are vast and rich. These riches have yet to be fully mined.

We have made serious efforts to support Spiritan communities in need, financially and in other ways. Particular attention has been



paid to those projects and provinces with which we have historical ties, such as East Africa and Ethiopia, but also the regional projects of Haiti, Mexico, and now the Dominican Republic. The fundraising office of the province has been given to the Generalate for international projects – while the province itself continues its efforts to organize mission appeals and fund specific projects.

Our diminishing numbers and the state of the North American Church has forced us outside ourselves – to serve collaboratively with lay men and women, Spiritan associates and others, to identify that which is uniquely Spiritan, and to “speak” it to our lay colleagues on boards, faculties, parish councils, and in missions. We make no pretension that this issue of lay association– and also that of internationality in the Province – is either clear or easy. These are not simple trends but radical changes of life and ministry. They can be, at once, threatening and disconcerting. But we find strength in the struggle. The clergy crisis, too, has provoked a critical examination of conscience – morally and personally to Spiritans. The smaller and more vulnerable we become, the more open to listen, share, and broaden our sense of self has occurred.



# A REFLECTION FROM BRAZIL ON ITS JOYS AND CHALLENGES

Jose Altevair da Silva

*Doubtless each circumscription has not only problems and preoccupations but also challenges and joys that encourage it to move ahead and construct a new world day by day. The vastness of Brazil in itself is a daunting challenge. However, united with the forces of Paraguay and Mexico, new inroads in mission are being gradually carved. Jose is director of the second cycle formation house in Sao Paulo, Brazil and was ordained in 1992.*

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Our Superior General wrote in the message for the Spiritan Year: "Our way forward should not be hindered by small things, it should not be smothered by secondary things but it should be centered on our fundamental experience and on the significant challenges which we meet". Our way forward is being built as history unfolds and is made up of joys and sorrows, nightmares and dreams. This is not an occasion to just complain. What follows is a simple sharing of the experiences which I and other confreres have lived which has fed our hopes within the Congregation through witnessing in a prophetic way.

## Challenges:

- The Spiritans arrived in Brazil in 1885. 119 years have gone by and even though in the beginning they had centered their attention in formation of the local Church, today the number of Brazilian Spiritans is a challenge to us since we are only **31: 3 bishops, 19 priests, 2 brothers and 7 students.**
- The question of the ageing process of our members is another challenge especially because we do not have structures to help the quality of life of older people. Today 35.48% of Brazilian Spiritans are over 50 years.

- Priority is not given to group involvement by confreres in vocational animation.
- The individual search for security and autonomy at the cost of the common project.
- Community living and an authentic prayer life; the acceptance of things as they are; lack of support for confreres and of praise for work done or the creation of a family atmosphere in our communities.
- Lack of motivation to live the charism of the Spiritan life, through community life, in a simple way, open to fraternal correction and permanent formation through teamwork; all of this tempered with a prayer life etc.
- Distance creates difficulties for frequent meetings which might strengthen a Spiritan spirituality (within Brazil there are confreres who work 4.200 km away from the provincial house).
- The lack of a full time vocations promoter.
- So many activities and the small number of confreres create difficulties to find someone who could go for preparation before taking on formation work.
- The difficulty to find places for missionary stage (*OTP*) outside of Brazil.
- An integrated affectivity during the formation process as well as during permanent training.
- A further difficulty is found in international communities where even though confreres have left their own countries, in a real sense they have never left home and this makes it difficult for them to assimilate the local culture.
- Experiences which arise from fraternal love, charity, engagement, being a presence in the lives of others, - all of these give us the joy of living and of living as Spiritans.

### Joys:

- ✓ The large meeting (known as the “encontrão”) when Spiritans in the districts, the Province of Brazil and from the International Group in Paraguay come together.
- ✓ Support and collaboration of the Districts for formation in the Province of Brazil.

- ✓ The creation of the Province of Brazil in 1990.
- ✓ The creation of the council of major religious superiors from Brazil, Paraguay and Mexico.
- ✓ Giving from our own poverty: the joy of having Brazilian Spiritans working in other countries (Senegal, Guiné Bissau, Germany, Nigeria, Philippians, France, Paraguay and Bolivia).
- ✓ The creation of groups of lay Spiritans.
- ✓ The common projects undertaken by the three circumscriptions of Brazil, Paraguay and Mexico, namely vocational promotion and formation (the novitiate and theology).
- ✓ Two annual meetings of the formators from these three countries which gives special attention to spirituality questions for those in formation and helps to elaborate objectives, challenges and important issues for all stages of formation.
- ✓ The missionary project in Bolivia which is one of the newest projects of the three circumscriptions and has the support of the Generalate.
- ✓ The Spiritan Jubilee brought new vigor to tasks undertaken together by the circumscriptions. Amongst the activities of the Jubilee special mention could be made of the youth congress which took place in São Paulo where 300 youth participated from Spiritan parishes in Brazil and Paraguay, as well as the youth congress of the Brasília – Minas Gerais region where 150 youth participated in a Spiritan parish in Governadores Valadares.

In the seas of life we experience strong waves,  
 However, much stronger than these is the power of the Holy Spirit.  
 We can always rely on the Holy Spirit.

# THE PROVINCE OF NIGERIA FACES ITS CHALLENGES

Gabriel E. Ezewudo

*With the changing structures of our dynamic Congregation, regionalisation as a concept has gained adherence, especially since Itaici (1992). It is not without its difficulties, and as Provincial of the Nigerian Province during this time of transition towards regionalisation, Gabriel is well placed to present some of the issues that a province must face when adopting this structure. Ordained in 1981, Gabriel has a wide experience of pastoral and formation work, as well as being Provincial of the Province of Nigeria.*

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## 1.0 The Structure of the new Nigerian Province

The Nigerian Province is both old and new in the Congregation. The old Nigerian Province was named in 1983. Its area covered the Spiritan presence in most of the country that included the Province of Nigeria-East (since 1976) and the former Kwara-Benue District. The Makurdi District joined WAF since 1979. The new Province took effect following the mandate of the present General Council on October 2, 2001, and lapped up the Makurdi area to form one Province for all Spiritans in Nigeria. I became the Provincial, and we began to operate the structure of one Province made up of four Regions (Ekiti, Makurdi, Okura and Onitsha Regions). Presently we have 476 professed members and 12 expatriate Spiritans.

Based on the orientation adopted at Itaici (1992) to implement Regionalisation, the Province of Nigeria is presently one of the 3 African circumscriptions that have Regions. The others are WAP and PAC. Regionalisation in Nigeria has the following peculiarities:

- All the four Regions derive from the same country. Although confreres belong to a Region by appointment, there is a



tendency to reflect the ethnic makeup of each Region to safeguard its identity. However this still differs from the country-based Regions that obtain in WAP and PAC.

- The Regions in Nigeria, unlike the European and American Regions where the collaborating Provinces experience decline in numbers, are actually growing numerically.
- There is a tacit understanding that our Regions will grow to become Provinces; they are actually in varying degrees of development.

Each Region has a Regional Council and enjoys semi-autonomy and certain competencies; but all are under one major superior. A Provincial Chapter held in July 2002 set the guidelines for relationships between the Province and the Regions. The Regional Superiors are members of the Provincial Council and the Council meets ordinarily four times a year.

The foregoing serves as an outline of the structure of the new Province of Nigeria that we have operated these past three years. (Refer to the Superior General's Report for key items of information on the Nigerian Province.) Bearing in mind the ambiguities we operate under, I choose to discuss the joys and challenges we have in the new Province using the following analytical themes:

## 2.1 One Province and our Witness to Unity

The announcement of one united Province of the Spiritans in Nigeria received a resounding welcome. It served as an evangelical witness in Nigeria where ethnic strife and divisions have characterized politics since Independence in 1960. If the nation has fought to keep together politically and economically, the Church that divides along ethnic lines would give bad example to the Nigerian society. It is worse still for a Congregation that has *cor unum* as its motto. We got commendation from ecclesiastical authorities and other religious Congregations for uniting as one Province. However old habits and mindsets die hard. Resentment, fear of domination and feelings of marginalisation still linger. One Regional would welcome appointments only of confreres from the

Region by origin. Another had feared that the Province might be working out the Region's extinction.

## **2.2 Administrative Proximity and Prompt Responses in a large Province**

To have Regional Superiors who could represent the Province in their areas of competence became a practical and grassroots approach. This suited a situation where the Congregation is currently involved in more than 26 ecclesiastical jurisdictions within Nigeria alone. Responsibilities include the administration of projects and the welfare of confreres and communities in a large country like Nigeria. With this anticipated relief in the home front, the Provincial of Nigeria or his delegate could then engage more purposefully in the needed visitation of over 95 confreres in more than 28 external missions and international groups. The visitations can be had to the extent that the budget for administration can accommodate the huge expenditures on flights.

With the Regional structure, however, our experience is that the guidelines were either not clearly understood or not always followed in such areas as making appointments, rendering accounts and administering of projects. Mobilization of members for Provincial objectives posed a threat; allegiance and loyalty to the Province suffered. These have contributed to the tension and conflicts between the Province and some of the Regions.

The above scenario can partly be explained by the personalities at play and by the inherent difficulties in the structure of Regionalisation. The Itaici document had observed, "Obstacles can also arise...which include inaccurate ideas about autonomy, authority or self-sufficiency." This speaks to our need for "constant conversion." (*Itaici* 1992 P. 95). Serious work is needed to achieve cohesion. We took up this challenge at a Province-wide seminar held in Okura the week of April 25 to May 1, 2004.

## **2.3 Common Formation Houses in a Situation of Scarce Resources**

The Province contends with the scarcity of (trained) formation personnel for our Novitiate, the 1st Cycle and the 2nd Cycle Formation. We also encounter the dwindling financial support from Cor Unum. Whereas the Regions take care of their postulants, pulling resources together at the Provincial level makes economic sense. It is thanks to the annual Cor Unum grants that we can operate at all. Nevertheless since Cor Unum provides less than 50% of our requests, the Province each year must scout for funds to make up the shortfall. For instance, for SIST alone, the Nigerian Province requested from Cor Unum 234,000 Euros for a projected 80 students in the 2004/2005 session and got 96,080 Euros. 41 Nigerian scholastics were billed to get into Year One in SIST in September 2004 but we have to cut down the number for want of funds and accommodation. The same applies for the Novitiate and Philosophy. Bearing in mind also that the products from SIST form a sizeable number that yearly serve the needs of 1<sup>st</sup> Appointments of the Congregation, we would welcome the suggestion that the General Council becomes more involved with 2nd Cycle formation.

## **2.4 Our Image as Nigerian Spiritans**

It is gratifying that the Nigerian Province at the moment can count on its growing numbers. This is both a joy and a challenge for administration. We rejoice where our personnel performs well. Also, we have anxieties where the fragilities of our confreres become manifest in international and intercultural mission communities, and where our confreres have to live and work outside Nigeria, e.g. in Europe and America. As members of an international missionary Congregation we want to be seen as committed fully to the inspiration of our Founders, and as ready to carry on the Spiritan tradition of selfless service to the poor and more abandoned everywhere. As we received from our missionary forebears from France, Ireland, England and Canada, we would want to give of ourselves to others.

On the other hand, some of our confreres working in international mission communities have experienced suspicion, distrust and

embarrassment from fellow Spiritans. Some are put down far not bringing in money from their homes, as do their counterparts from the West. Also, the restrictions imposed on confreres from the South by some Provinces are equally a source of concern and worry far us in administration. We would be interested in working out equitable guidelines that take into account the mission we serve as well as the needs of the Spiritan circumscriptions involved, all in the spirit of our *cor unum*.

## 2.0 Conclusion

One final remark on the experience of the new structure in the African Provinces: it is that all agree that Regionalisation is the right way to go for now. For us in Nigeria, three years may be small to come to an evaluation. Nevertheless we are going to do just that at our Enlarged Provincial Council this September. We would want to examine the adequacy of the structures. For example, must we have Regional Councils? Would Regional Superiors serving as members of the Provincial Council compromise their allegiance to their separate Regions where they stand in competition with the Province? Apart from interpersonal difficulties, the conflicts hitherto experienced between the Province and the Regions can often be traced to inadequate finances. What is our way through this financial quagmire? I suppose I am posing one key question emanating with full force in the Bursar General's Report to this General Chapter.



## JOYS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY THE “IOF” ON THE ROAD TO BECOMING THE “IOP”

Wenceslas Pierrot Rabe

*In analyzing the particular situation of the Indian Ocean Foundation, Wenceslas puts his finger on the ring of problems that are common to foundations as they move towards becoming provinces. The challenges are many and varied, but they are reduced to size by the joys of seeing the Church moving forward in this exciting way. Wenceslas was ordained in 1986 and is presently superior of the I.O.F.*

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The main challenges being faced by the F.O.I. at present are as follows:

- The search for a way of being Spiritan in our Region (1)
  - Living in international communities, beginning with formation (2)
  - Finding solutions to the daily needs of a new Province (3)
- 1) One of the most obvious tasks for the FOI is to continue a work which was begun 20 years ago by Spiritans who came from Europe. They had their own convictions, mentalities, and ideas of mission. It is a fact that it was they, who through the superiors of the three Districts of Madagascar, Mauritius and Reunion, and a generous availability, brought the Foundation to birth. It is certain that without them, we would never have seen the light of day. But it is one thing for people from outside to give flesh to an intuition for a particular region, and another to give the same project its local flavour, expression and implantation into the reality of an area; this is the task of confreres who are native to that place. I say this while recognising the value of the work accomplished by our

predecessors. This is the greatest challenge that we have to face.

- 2) This plan to naturalise, inculturate the Spiritan charism and its practice brings us up against another challenge which is no less daunting: the differences that exist among the new generation of Spiritans who come from the islands. They are the ones who have to think out and formulate what is the essence of the Spiritan patrimony that we have received. One could be excused for feeling it is an impossible task – to produce a unity from the four different countries that would constitute the future Province of the Indian Ocean. What do the Malagaches, the Mauritians, the Reunionnais and the Seychellois have in common? Nobody wants to aim at uniformity: this would be very negative because these peoples have their own particular talents to contribute and it would be a great loss to lose them. But within the very heart of our region, we are different in many ways and in our cultures; a Malagache is not Reunionnais, a Mauritian is not a Seychellois. Our countries are different, our political systems are not the same and there are big differences in our standards of living. So at first sight, one would be tempted to say that the plan is somewhat utopian!

Our task is to try to overcome the nationalism that exists, the mentalities that are sometimes rather narrow, to open ourselves up to other realities apart from our own and to accept to share the small amount of personnel at our disposal. The members of the old Districts are still not totally convinced that the young confreres in the Foundation will not be automatically replacing them in the works and parishes for which they have been responsible.

Today, as yesterday, the only way to respond to this challenge and overcome our handicaps is to live our Spiritan “culture” and spirituality as deeply as possible. It is here that we can meet each other, brothers working for the same mission which belongs not to us but to the mission of the Church. This is what St. Paul said when he wrote to the Corinthians – that despite the diversity of members, unity must be preserved whatever

the cost. It also applies perfectly to us. We agree totally with one of the stated aims of this present Chapter: “to maintain unity in a Congregation that is evermore diversified” (GCh. 04/14). We are already committed to such a search – to re-discover our consecrated life and authentic international community living at an ever deeper level.

- 3) It goes without saying that even after 20 years of existence, our Foundation is still feeling its way forward. Nothing is definitive and each step that we take has to be carefully calculated. This is true in all areas, but particularly in the following:

- **In Mission:** Should we be more involved in mission “ad extra”, as was the case with our predecessors? On the other hand, we must not forget the necessity for “home bases”, where we can explain the beauty and the demands made by the missionary vocation to our Churches of origin. It will also entail a formation programme that is as close as possible to the culture of the candidates. Later, it will have to provide special houses for old or sick confreres, while not exaggerating the comfort aspect. We must learn to remember one thing without forgetting others.
- **In Formation:** How can we provide a good, complete formation programme for young confreres when we are so lacking in competent personnel? We are at the end of our human resources; the older confreres have given their all, but they are now too advanced in years. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the young people joining us will be graced with the charism of formator: to be a formator is a special vocation. Those who are thus gifted would first of all have to spend some time in a missionary situation, quite apart from the necessary years of study. We are really in a period of transition: we have to do everything but with so few means at our disposal.

- **In Finances:** The problem of finance is always with us. As with any non-lucrative enterprise, it is a question of knowing where to find money – for formation communities, for meetings of the members of the Council, and for the thousand other administrative needs of any normal circumscription. So far, we have benefited greatly from the solidarity of the Congregation and we thank all those circumscriptions which have helped us. The difficult question of raising local funds remains and the solution is not evident; despite the efforts made by some confreres, our financial contribution is still meager.
  
- These are just some of the many difficulties that keep recurring – not just one after the other but all at the same time! It is not easy. But it would be wrong to think that we are being crushed by the situation. To get the balance right, one has to mention the joys that we experience. It is wonderful to be able to live such an adventure in the Church, knowing that we have the support of the whole Congregation. It is also a great joy to see the confreres set out for Pakistan and Papua New Guinea, happy in their ministry alongside their brothers and sisters from the South. Finally, it is so good to see our countries, which have received so much from European missionaries in the past, taking up the missionary baton themselves. It is truly a Church on the march and that fills us with great joy.



# JOYS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE YOUNG PROVINCE OF PAC

Lambert Ndjana

*Lambert Ndjana, who comes from Cameroon, is the present superior of the Central African Province. His three years at the head of this vast circumscription, covering four countries, has given him the chance to discover a path "towards a more authentic expression of the Spiritan charism". This young province has been evolving in a context of great poverty and underdevelopment, but they have had the joy of being able to rely on the generosity of a Congregation, which is very good at sharing. However, its members must not neglect the demands implicit in the evangelical poverty of religious life.*

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Just like the disciples of Emmaus, after the events of 1999, confreres of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Congo Brazzaville and Gabon are now travelling towards a more authentic expression of our Spiritan charism.

Spiritans arrived in this area in 1844 (Gabon), 1883 (Congo Brazzaville) 1889 (Central Africa and 1916 (Cameroon); they are still present in them today.

## 1 The Birth of PAC in 1999

The PAC was born on the day of Pentecost, 23 May 1999. This new face of the Spiritan mission in central Africa resulted from an alliance between the four old Districts and the Central African Foundation. It was a long road that led up to it, full of reflections, hesitations, analysis and a great deal of prayer. We decided to combine forces for a better organisation of the Spiritan presence in the area and its missionary service.

From its birth up to the present day, there have been five events of particular importance: the first Chapter (Libreville 1999), the visit of

the General Council (2002), the Enlarged General Council at Pittsburgh, the Enlarged Provincial Council at Ngoya in Cameroon, and the celebrations of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Congregation. In the televised Mass on this occasion, we wished to convey that the Congregation has a past, a present and a future.

## **2.The PAC in Action**

The area covered by PAC has a population of 27 millions. There are 239 members, 159 of whom originate in the Province. Another 80 confreres have been appointed to PAC from elsewhere. There are 93 students in all: 67 professed, 9 novices and 17 postulants. In all, we come from 13 different countries in Africa and Europe and our members are working in 17 countries around the world.

### **2.1 An intercultural and international foundation**

The structure of the PAC is designed to allow members to retain their local culture and identity. Each region has its own organisation while formation is done in common. Inside the PAC, members move around to work in other regions that make up the Province. Africans and Europeans share the same community life and the same mission.

### **2.2 Missionary Project**

Encouraged by Maynooth and Pittsburgh, the PAC based its missionary work on commitments *ad extra* and helping the local Churches within the area of the Province. But the PAC has also felt the need of putting down deeper roots in central Africa. The Enlarged Provincial Council asked for a larger number of members to be in the PAC area to increase our profile: this would be achieved especially through Spiritans properties and the quality of community life.

#### **2.2.1 Mission *ad intra***

The PAC has inherited missionary commitments from the Districts that formerly covered the area. We are trying to continue them where possible: North Cameroon (a Muslim

area); East Cameroon with the Baka Pygmies; the north of Congo Brazzaville; the east of Central Africa; etc.

### **2.2.2 Mission ad extra**

We have received calls for help 'ad extra' from the Generalate, other circumscriptions and some Churches in Central Africa. We have taken on a parish in Equatorial Guinea. We need the courage to leave some of the traditional engagements in order to address the more difficult and urgent needs of the people: young people without work, the marginalized in towns and villages, victims of AIDS, street children etc. In this, we need to encourage each other in such difficult tasks.

### **2.3 Preserving unity in diversity**

It has to be said that for some of the confreres, especially those who do not originate in the area of the PAC, the reality of the new Province does not loom large in their vision of things. It is a far-off structure that brings more inconveniences than benefits e.g. the need for a greater sharing in finance for the running of our formation and administration. For the locals, their loyalty to their region is often more apparent than their adhesion to the Province as such. Evidently, the Provincial Administration has an important job of explanation to do if the advantages of the wider identity are to be appreciated.

The cost of running the Provincial administration remains high, with living and travel expenses, travel for students, recyclages etc.

### **2.4 A shared formation programme**

Apart from the local Postulancies, the rest of the formation programme is shared in common: philosophy at Libreville, novitiate at Balmayo (Cameroon) and theology at Ngoya (Cameroon). We also take Spiritan students from other parts of Africa. Financing the programme remains a major preoccupation; for two years, we did not accept any students because of financial restraints and the formations houses are still not all completed.

### **3 Searching for an authentic expression of our Spiritan Charism**

#### **3.1 In missionary dynamism**

PAC wants to be ever more attentive to the needs of the Mission, despite the ageing of confreres and the lack of money. The impression I get in my visits is of a strengthening of faith and the Spiritan identity, in prayers and meetings. There is an improvement in the lifestyle and the quality of community living. All the regions must make vocations work an integral part of their apostolate.

#### **3.2 In living poverty in a context of under-development**

It seems to me that evangelical poverty and solidarity with the poor speak louder to our contemporaries than any other aspect of our religious consecration. But it is difficult to explain the nature of our poverty to people who are themselves living in real poverty. Poverty for them is not something to be valued: it speaks of penury, disgrace, insecurity and human marginalisation. But the candidates who join religious life often experience social promotion, with guaranteed security and well being.

Religious poverty, in a context of misery, only has meaning in its dimension of solidarity with the poor, sharing of goods, working for the common good, struggling for human development and an improvement in the condition of people's lives. We must get across to our young confreres that evangelical poverty is a new type of poverty, as preached and practised by Jesus himself – poverty as a sign of giving and communion.

#### **3.3 Poverty and self-sufficiency**

Financial self-sufficiency is a serious and urgent problem for our young Province. This does not go contrary to what we have said above regarding evangelical poverty; it is rather the condition which makes it possible and authentic. It is not just a question of acquiring material means: it is also a sign of the growth of our communities and acceptance of the sacrifices and changes of mentality that it implies.

Evangelical poverty becomes a greater sign when linked to a lived solidarity, sharing what we have and giving ourselves to God and our brothers and sisters.



## Conclusion

On behalf of all the confreres of PAC, I would like to finish by expressing my sincere thanks to the whole Congregation for the many gestures of solidarity towards our young Province. You have helped us, you are still helping us and we are sure you will continue to do so in our search for this vital autonomy.

# INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY LIVING: A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Jude Nnorom

*Jude hails from the Province of Nigeria and works in the District of South Africa. He was ordained in 1994. As well as his pastoral experience in South Africa, Jude has been Novice Master in SCAF and is at present Superior of the District of South Africa. He offers a realistic appraisal of some of the joys and challenges inherent in international community living.*

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## South Africa: The Rainbow Nation

I arrived in South Africa a few months after the first democratic elections which saw the participation of every eligible citizen as opposed to the apartheid electoral practices of the past decades. The joys of the freedom gained through much bloodshed and many negotiations could be seen in the faces of all, though there were some who still preferred to live in the old system of apartheid. Though structural reminders of apartheid are still evident in the many cities of the country, the barriers that were created on the basis of race and colour are gradually being overcome. People, White, Colored, Indian and Black can choose where to live and no longer fear prosecution based on the defunct group areas act of 1957.

A few months after taking office, the then president of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela inaugurated the Truth and Reconciliation commission, which was charged with the task of listening to the different abuses of the past, and identifying those who would be entitled to some reparation for the amount of blood that was shed in the land. Many stories were told about tortures. Tears flowed freely from the eyes of the members of the

commission including the respected, retired Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Desmond Tutu. People of diverse cultural affiliations demanded that the land be cleansed and many religious leaders of different faiths joined hands together in prayer, asking God for forgiveness for the many crimes that were perpetrated by both the agents of the apartheid government as well as by those who regarded themselves as freedom fighters. The media at that time capitalized on the revelations made at the commission and continuously concentrated their reports on the many racial tensions which existed in some communities. One wondered whether South Africans would be able to live in harmony.

### **The Joys of International Community Living**

There are aspects of international community living which are worth mentioning and which contribute to many effective pastoral works. In his article on International community living in the Maynooth document of 1998, Rene Tabard, writes that International community involves “both mind and heart” ( Maynooth 1998; p.63). He pointed out some of the joys and challenges of such a community and asked that we do not “over exaggerate” the difficulties. Taking a bearing from his article, let me mention some of the joys I have experienced in living in an international community.

**The Guidance of Experience:** The confreres who were working in South Africa before I arrived had experienced a lot with regard to different pastoral strategies which work with the local people. These experiences had been accumulated over the period of so many years and became a reservoir for those who would come later so as to continually reinforce those positive aspects that yielded good results and avoid repeating those that did not work. Living in an international community provides this guidance of experience as comparisons that are sometimes made are not based on a particular “Church outlook”. The lively discussions on how things are done in the different countries from where the members of the community come also add a lot of joy to mission.

**The Sign of Unity:** Living in an international community in the South African context brings a sign of unity in a world of diversities. It is difficult for a lot of people to understand how a “Black man and a “white“ man can live under the same roof. The negative experiences of racial tensions in the past make them look at our communities with awe wondering how it is possible for us to share a lot in common. Our communities become a visible sign of the equality which we preach. The sharing of things in common, celebrating birthdays, feast days, ordination anniversaries, exemplifies the reality of the reign of God which is the foundation of our religious aspirations.

**A Sign of Practical Witness:** One of the main focuses in our world today is that people are no longer seen as credible simply by what they say, but how they live that which they preach. Words become true reflections of beliefs if the one who uses them for any particular purpose does that which is said. As missionaries, our international communities become an aspect of the unspoken witness which we bear for the reign of God. Our presence in the community becomes a ‘sermon’ on its own as people realize that bearing witness can be more authentic in a lived life which becomes a symbol of Christian fidelity.

**A World Vision:** Another aspect of international living is the fact that it provides a vision for future generations. As young people experience our international living, especially in the context of vocation animation, they appreciate the fact that boundaries are created and broken by human endeavors. This vision helps them to appreciate the uniqueness of their various experiences which can be elaborated in a context that is universal. Our communities therefore provide an alternative to the isolation which they experience in their respective home contexts, be they Zulus, Afrikaners, Basotho or Amakhosa. Those who live in the international community for their own part, enjoy the open mindedness which is the fruit of their collaborative pastoral approach, as they can identify the fruit of the Spirit in the culture in which they live that is the source of identity for the young people who visit their communities.



## Challenges of International Living

**Models of Communication:** Communication has become an important aspect of our lives in the world. Whereas we have effective means of communication available to us, what we say and how we say it still has an impact on those with whom we live and even those to whom we minister. Various cultures have different ways of communicating various events, be they sad or joyful. For some, analogies, are better ways of communication, hoping that the person whom one is addressing will understand what is being said and make the necessary application. Others are more direct and believe that the truth has no gray area. Communication can therefore become a challenging area in our communities. Sometimes we communicate in a way that the other person may understand as demeaning, and this can create tensions within the community.

**Resource Generation and Management:** Our mission as a Congregation often takes us to those areas where “the Church has difficulty in finding workers (SRL 4). In these areas, the local Church may not have sufficient resources either in personnel or materials. Being a “challenging” apostolate, it may not be yielding much for the sustenance of the confreres involved in it and the confreres may have to resort to help from the Generalate (which also has limited funds), or their provinces, or even their personal benefactors. Sometimes this creates tensions, as some confreres who do not have the means feel they are not contributing to the running of the mission. This is also evident, not only in our Institute, but also in other Religious institutes, as one Oblate friend told me once; ‘Jude, you know how frustrating it is that when my confrere receives a letter from home, it is about how the writer can help in his mission, while if I receive letters, it is about the death of uncle Max and that there is no money for his funeral’. With regard therefore to income generation, in an international community, there is need for affirmation for those who contribute not only by their presence but also by other means, and also for those who contribute only by their presence.

**Personality Differences:** Our individual uniqueness as human beings is one of the peculiarities which shape our attitude to our communities and society at large. We perceive things differently and react to situations in a varying number of ways. Our personalities therefore play an important role in living in an international community. Some people do not easily take to jokes while others cherish jokes as a way of living a fraternal life. These differences are brought to bear on our vision for the particular mission where we are and also exemplify themselves in the strategies we employ in our relationship to those who are not members of our apostolic community.

The context of the mission where we are, especially as we get acquainted daily with the print media in their reporting of events in that particular context, may have an influence on how we develop those latent characteristics of our personalities. In some instances, the media report crime as being committed by people of a particular color pigmentation, and if we live in community with such people, and they have personalities which we find challenging, these reports from the media can influence our living an authentic fraternal life. While it does take time to understand the characteristics of a person, it is encouraged in an international community to try to know how a confrere will react, given various circumstances.

**The Exercise of Authority:** It is ironic that while most people in the world abhor autocratic principles, they expect their leaders to be firm in decision-making. Sometimes it becomes difficult for leaders to be firm while not wanting to be seen as autocratic. This also happens in an international community. Having come from different local Churches with different theological autonomies, tensions may arise in the use of a particular theological system especially in the context where the local Church of our mission is still in its early stages. Authority should be used in such a situation to help determine a particular paradigm which should be followed. This paradigm should be one with which every member of the community should be comfortable even those who think their own ideas have been left out. This is not an easy task but one that is learned in the process of community discernment.

These are some of the joys and challenges which we face in our international living. However, it is important to point out that many things do not depend on us but on the power of the Holy Spirit who is the source of our missionary commitments. A healthy prayer life in a community most often helps to distill the human tensions which often times are unavoidable.

# INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY LIFE IN PARAGUAY

Albino Vitor Martins de Oliveira

*Vitor, from the Portuguese province, was ordained in 1977 but has lived for more than thirty years in Paraguay, where he is superior of the international group. Here he outlines something of his long lived experience in international communities and the respect for each other necessary so that communities are created which are authentic witnesses in today's world.*

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## Preparation

I need to say that there was something very important which helped me (and continues to help me) live in international community: that was the preparation. The fact that I spent two years studying in a foreign country; being a member of a mixed international missionary team, living with the members of this team and making preparations together to be sent to Paraguay, all of this was an enormous help to me to live in international community. The fact that I lived during formation in another country predisposed me to accept different ways of living and of thinking; in a word it helped me to accept another culture. I believe that this predisposition is fundamental if one is to live in an international community.

Another attitude which seems very important if one is to live in an international community and in a different culture is to respect different ways of living and thinking. It is easy to be tempted to criticize and even to undervalue the ways in which another culture manifests itself in day-to-day living. Someone taught me that everyone has their own way of living and thinking and that we need to respect and accept this without criticism and indeed even without commentary.



### **The beginning of this living experience**

When I arrived in Paraguay I met confreres there from Trinidad, Canada, Switzerland, and a few days later confreres from Spain and France. The team of which I was a member was made up of Spaniards and Portuguese. Living together at the beginning was totally normal where we mutually accepted and gave space to each other. As time went by differences began to appear. This is to be expected: people begin to get to know each other and individually they begin to show themselves as they are without the masks which are used at the beginning. Questions began to be articulated about different ways of acting and communicating. Here I am speaking of cultural questions and personal characteristics. Without any doubt two aspects come together: the culture of the country that each person comes from and also the personality of the person.

On the other hand the concrete situation of each one began to become obvious: those who had already spent several years in Paraguay; those who had spent less time there and whose experience and work had been in a school or in provincial administration or had in a short work experience. Some came from other mission areas, others came from their own country and from a team which had been prepared in an international setting. Without any doubt, the experience of each person has a significant influence when one begins to live in an international community and form an international community.

### **The move from an international group to an international community**

I can easily recall what the experience of an international community within an international group was at the beginning. I would like now to recall this life experience in a small international community which also functioned as a work team in a concrete mission project. I would like to refer to two different attitudes which each one can take on; on these attitudes will depend the success of the experience. On the one hand would be the attitude which simply accepts living in an international community. On the other hand is an attitude of a more proactive nature which wants to form

international community. Without a doubt, both attitudes are quite different. People who have the first attitude can be more passive and it may be used to justify a lack of effort to construct community. Those with the second attitude are more active and such people make a significant effort to build community.

I think it would be more honest if I were to say that my attitude was a desire to form an international community. I am not saying that this is a big virtue because it may have grown out of a simple wish to life outside the milieu in which I grew up. Furthermore I cannot say that I was always active in this desire to form community. However, I see this as an attitude, indeed a fundamental attitude, and very important if one is to live in an international community.

Together with this attitude, it is necessary to be convinced that community does not happen by chance, - it is formed. It is absolutely necessary that those who live in community be convinced that they need to be sincerely engaged in the construction of their community; that such a community will be even more authentic to the extent that the confreres there do their utmost to ensure that it is strengthened. Even though it may seem strange, it is possible to meet confreres who have lost faith in an international community, because they expected more from this type of community (this can also happen in the case of communities with confreres from the same national background). At the end of the day the fact is that they have given up hope instead of making their contribution in an effort to build up community. Moreover when they think that they do not get what they expected, they simply give up active participation or they look for something in other settings which may fill up the emptiness they feel.

For this reason I believe that at times it is better to start an international community with new people, than to try and integrate new people into a community which already exists (new not only in the sense of being young but also new in outlook). In some way the same could be said about apostolic aspects of international communities because those who are veterans there may have little patience with new arrivals and the latter may want to act and live as they have done in another place instead of inculturating themselves into the new situation, with their new colleagues, in a new situation.

It is also true that in a community or team which has new people, and especially so when we speak of international communities, you need somebody with more experience who can help the new people integrate and inculturate themselves. However, personal experience teaches me that all of the group should start off together. Here a necessary condition is that they live together during a sufficient time of preparation where they can experience life as an international community and the inculturation process already as a community in a new missionary setting.

On the other hand, it is practically indispensable that members of a community, and especially an international community, have the same mentality in the areas of theology, church and pastoral activity as well as similar ideas on the style of religious and community life. Without doubt the community will grow through the efforts of all its members but it is necessary that there be agreement on the starting point in these areas which I have mentioned. These aspects are of extreme importance if they are to live and carry out a common mission. On this question, I need to admit once again that I had some advantages: namely a certain agreement in theological and pastoral areas. This in my case was more easily possible because of the fact that we started to live out our mission in our small international community at the same time that the diocese where we were working was also beginning. We as a group tried together with the new bishop, with the priests and religious, as well as with the lay pastoral workers to plan a pastoral strategy for the new diocese without being tied down by older arrangements. The process lived at diocesan level helped us to build unity, not only with the other pastoral agents of the diocese, but as well and especially so, in our small missionary international community.

### **Looking at the international group**

The international Spiritan group in Paraguay is characterized by the great mobility of its members. I don't know other international groups well enough to make comparisons. However, I can say that there is a significant amount of people that have moved in and out of our group. At some times the group had a good number of members and this encouraged us to think of new



projects. However, sometime later those of us who were still around found that we were over burdened with work which we found very difficult to shoulder.

I would like to share with you something which caused us to reflect at one point in our history about how new members were sent to our group. When we asked some of the more recently arrived members if they had asked to come to Paraguay on first appointment, none had in fact indicated Paraguay as a possible mission where they would like to work. Personally I find myself asking if this fact does not explain a series of difficulties of adaptation and common living.

We find it hard to adapt both to life in community as well as to what the people expect and also to what the Church needs. I think that many confreres did not have an adequate preparation to become members of an international group or indeed to integrate themselves into a people or a Church different from their own. I also ask myself if just now there is some lack of missionary enthusiasm as well as a deficiency of a spirit of self-giving to others; a lack of authenticity in putting into practice our baptismal consecration to live poverty, chastity and obedience.

We can say with certainty that one of the great evils of our time is exaggerated individualism even though as some point out that this individualism brings with it something positive, namely the value given to each person. But it is evident that individualism is incompatible with community life and shared mission. Perhaps there is a cultural question here: what for one person is individualism, for another may be a normal lifestyle. If this be the case, it points to one more reason to ask that those who make up an international community be given a time of preparation with people from another culture to construct a community where people can be happy.

Without wanting to turn this talk into a complaining session, I can say that it is very difficult to live with confreres who turn the Congregation's house into a lodging where you go to eat or sleep only when more interesting places and people are not available. The same can be said of people who only remember that there is a superior or a bursar when they need to ask for money and exaggerated amounts of money.



Something which needs to be treated during preparation for living in international communities is training to administer the goods of the community because good administration and good housekeeping help the community atmosphere significantly.

Prayer is fundamental in a religious community. It is true that our Rule of Life foresees moments of prayer in community. Here as well, it seems that cultural aspects come into play. It seems that at times there isn't sufficient mutual confidence to suggest moments of prayers or the celebration of the Eucharist because the willingness to participate can be colored by the culture or the formation of each one.

# THE JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF MEXICO

Peter Conaty

*For some time international community living has become the norm in our Spiritan communities, especially among the newer groups. The situation of Mexico which, at the time of writing, has nineteen confreres from twelve different national backgrounds, is highlighted by Peter Conaty. Peter, who is from the Irish Province, was ordained in 1983. He was Director of Formation in Ireland where he also lectured in theology. He is presently Superior of the Mexican International Group.*

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## **Founding Myth**

In 1965, both Provinces of the US decided to open a mission in Peru, which closed in 1971. Taking the Pan-American Highway back to the USA, the 3 confreres, now consisting solely of members of the USA West, stopped off at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and asked Our Lady's guidance in finding a mission in keeping with the Spiritan charism. They were directed to the State of San Lois Potosi and turned down many fine parishes until they were shown the abandoned missions in the mountains where the Huesteco Indians live. So, in a small mud structure behind the Parish church in Tanlajas, on February 22, 1971, the Spiritan presence in Mexico began. Tanlajas has over 20,000 people, 94% of whom are Indigenous, living in 38 different communities spread over a large mountain area. Within less than a month of their arrival, two other large Indigenous missions were taken on, with a confrere living in each mission. Less than eight months later, one of the confreres Patrick Townsend, who had formerly been a missionary in Easter Nigeria, died of a heart attack. The mission was initially a project of USA West, with confreres from the Province

of Canada joining the group beginning in '79. It became an international group less than 10 years later receiving its first 1st appointment in 1989 from the Province of France. The group has become increasingly international over the past 15 years and this year had 19 confreres from 12 different nationalities. [France 3, Poland 3, USA West 2 (one of whom is from Vietnam), Portugal 2, Ireland 2, Mexico 2, with one from Canada, Trinidad, Nigeria, Angola & Puerto Rico] [14 ordained, one brother & 3 on OTP] There are 7 Mexican confreres finally professed [Paraguay 2, Mexico 2, Bolivia, Spain, Mozambique,] and 9 in formation.

### *High Mobility of Personnel*

While rejoicing in the growth of the Int. Group, it is interesting to note that apart from the 14 ordained Spiritans working presently in the group, 33 ordained Spiritans have left the group, in its relatively short history. That is one a year. 12 confreres have also done their OTP with the group during that time. The sense of commitment, belonging and bonding that may have existed formally in missions entrusted to national groups does not come about as easily in international groups and certainly needs to be fostered. The question of why confreres leave, why they give up on the dream, why they opt for other ways of life, is something we must continually ask.

Added to this for us, was the initial difficulty with visas, up to 15 years ago the confreres had to leave the country every 6 months to renew their visas. At present only 2 non-Mexican members of the group have residency. It takes us at least 10 years to get residency and the yearly renewal of visas is a very trying and expensive process for us. While all international groups are fragile, this mobility and uncertainty heightens the sense of fragility of our group.

## Cultural Diversity

Difficulties, misunderstandings and sources of conflict arise in all groups, but these are further heightened in International groups due to the absence of a common cultural background. As well as our differences in origin, we range in age from late teens (if you include those in formation ) to late 70's, from different styles of formation, with sometimes radically different theologies, different experiences of church, different understandings of religious and community life, ways of praying, and different life experiences and expectations, different tastes in food, etc. Yet, we do manage to get along together and participate in a common project. This is possible only through working constantly at communication, community building and through regular meetings of the entire group. We have a meeting of the whole group once a month as well as a yearly retreat, and rarely is anyone missing.

International living at this level helps us to have a greater sense of the diversity of the church and the Congregation, it also helps us to avoid falling into uni-cultural approaches to the apostolate and to mission. In a world of so much division, it shows that unity is possible. We have noticed that young confreres who have had no trans-cultural experience during their formation, find it much more difficult to break out of the mold of their own local church.

## *Some of our Concerns*

The Mexican church tends to be more traditional and conservative, and the preoccupations of many local clergy are not ones shared by many confreres in the Group. So, there is a reluctance to attend meetings and functions of the local churches where we work. This can hinder the contribution we can make to the local church and our acceptance by that local church.

\* Ours is a relatively young group, with many on their first appointment, so we would benefit from some more experienced confreres to accompany the younger ones. We find that we often have to ask young confreres to take on responsibilities shortly after



joining the group without having the benefit of time to settle in properly.

\*Where possible, in international groups, it would be better to have more than two from any one ethnic, national or linguistic group, so that there are greater possibilities for recreation and companionship.

\*As a group we tend to be very work orientated. Working with poor, oppressed peoples, tends to drain your energy, so we need to develop a better culture of leisure and of spending time together.

\*Spanish is our common language as a group and we use it in our community prayer; however, we are reluctant to enter into faith sharing. This is something we have to put more effort into.

### ***Striving for Unity***

Because of some of the divisions that existed among our group in the past, there is a strong emphasis on unity within the culture of the group. So, there is a strong acceptance of diversity in order to avoid conflict and confrontation. While this has its benefits, it is not always healthy. So, there is a challenge for us to find more creative ways to deal with sources of conflict.

A possible source of conflict in any group comes around the area of the sharing of resources. The original members of the group coming from USA & Canada received living allowances from their provinces and had easier access to sources of funding than confreres coming from other parts of the world. While we have established a common fund for the income of the group, it is not as easy to deal with the double standards that we often have among ourselves as regards access to resources and this can be the cause of much unease. Equally, expectations of what one is entitled to, and needs to have for ones ministry, can vary from culture to culture. When the resources are scarce, this can be a source of conflict. One has to be careful that there are not double standards here too. While we try to live by our work, our income from this source is not sufficient to cover our needs. So, we need to work

more consistently on becoming self-sufficient economically. I cannot see this happening if we remain faithful to the option we have made to continue working for the Indigenous Peoples of Mexico. So, what do we do?

### ***New Appointments***

New appointments and our willingness to accept young confreres for their OTP have enabled us to expand our mission and presence in Mexico in recent years and also to ensure that there are two or three Spiritans in every community. I feel that there could be greater contact between the group and the circumscriptions from which the confreres come. This is particularly true on the sharing of information on confreres arriving for the first time. This is recommended in the 'Guide for First Appointments', but there is reluctance to comply with it. As we become increasingly international, the need to have this interchange becomes more evident; this should facilitate the accompaniment of the young confrere, particularly if difficulties arise.

### ***Formation***

The formation of Mexican Spiritans has been a major part of our work in recent years and we have been blessed with confreres who have joined us. This blessing brings with it the challenge for us to become more Mexican and to allow and facilitate the emergence of a Mexican Foundation. While having all our young Mexican confreres on trans- cultural mission looks good on paper, their difficulties in adapting to the challenges of their situations, as well as other problems, raise questions for our style of formation and training for mission.

### ***The Regional Collaboration***

We belong to two regions, that of N. America & the Caribbean and in the last few years the Latin America Region where we collaborate

on formation and the project in Bolivia. The financial support we receive from the Provinces of Canada, USA as well as the USA Irish, together with what we get from CorUnum enables us financially to do the work that we do in Mexico. This is concrete collaboration and solidarity and an example of real International Community Living at a broader level in the Congregation.

## SPIRITAN YEAR: BACK TO THE FUTURE

Eduardo Miranda Ferreira

*Eduardo, who is a member of the General Council, hails from the province of Portugal and was ordained in 1977. Here he outlines for us important events of the Spiritan Year. This year is seen not just as something that is finished but also as something that we need to recall constantly, so that in fidelity to the past and the charism of the founders, we may be able to construct the future which awaits us.*

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When I was asked to share with you how we celebrated the Spiritan Year, I remembered what a contemporary historian said: "returning to the intuitions of the past will change my perception of what is happening today. The more I understand my origins, the better I understand my place in today's world. Having just celebrated our Jubilee, I believe that we experienced, in a way, "a going back to the future".

The decision, from the General Chapter of Maynooth of organizing a Spiritan Year with the aim of "*favouring the renewal of the Congregation and the spread of the Spiritan missionary spirituality*", was welcomed with enthusiasm by the Province of Portugal.

The message John Paul II addressed to the Congregation (May 20th, 2002) pointed as well to the core of our Jubilee celebration: "*I invite you to remain faithful to the twofold heritage of your founders: the attention to the poor, to everyone socially in need or disfavoured, and to the missionary service, that is, the proclamation of the Good News of Christ to all men, in a particular way to those who have not yet received the message of the Gospel*".

The methodology followed in order to achieve the proposed aims was the elaboration of a program designed on the basis of four themes that, in turn, gave rise to four working committees, in



which lay people were also involved: **divulging**, in order to make known who we are; **sharing**, in order to share our spirituality; **renewing**, in order to give greater spiritual strength to our confreres and communities; **celebrating**, in order to mark the Spiritan Year, through special celebrations in the communities and elsewhere. A secretariat operated the coordination of all the works.

The solemn and public opening of the Spiritan Year took place in the dioceses of the country where we have a significant historical insertion. These celebrations were presided over by the respective local bishops. This option of associating the local churches with the celebrations of the Jubilee has for us a double meaning: thankfulness for the reception we have been granted by the local churches, and the opportunity to benefit from this special moment in order to exercise our ministry of awakening the missionary conscience.

**1.0. - NEW WAYS ... THE SAME MISSION** - As in every province of Europe, Portugal, since its beginning in 1867, was structured around the first and foremost priority of forming new Spiritans, which occupied many of its members. The circumstances have changed and the fidelity to being Spiritan has brought about the question of change of paradigm. After all, what is it that truly defines us? The Spiritan Year placed itself in this context of searching for new ways of Spiritan mission in the world and in Europe, of living religious life, and of an actualisation of the faithfulness to the vocation received. That concern prompted some initiatives that were intended to reread our world and to incarnate the new missionary paradigm: temperance, humble insertion in the life of the poor, interchange, sharing, welcoming the other, coherent testimony, and prophetic loving presence.

**1.1. Above all, the "Ad Gentes" commitment** - Up to the 80's, the Province only knew two missionary destinations: Angola and Cape Verde. Thus, the communion and participation in the new projects of the Congregation are now receiving special attention. It is our joy that in the course of the Spiritan Year five young confreres have received their first appointments to different and significant situations: Taiwan, Amazon, Mexico, Guine-Bissau, and Brazil. Angola, Mozambique, Mexico, and Cape Verde are the places

where, presently, four young professed confreres are doing their missionary pastoral experience.

**1.2. Mission in the steet** - *"Mission in an Uncertain World"* was the theme of a symposium that took place in Torre d'Aguilha, from June 7th to 9th, 2002. Different people from the Church, the Congregation, from the realm of politics, and of culture intervened brilliantly on the following topics: *"The uncertainties of the contemporary world"*; *"Which mission for Europe?"*; *"The mission in the border and the borders of mission"*; *"Amazon, mission and spirituality of the land"*; *"Dharmic integration and globalisation: Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation."*; *"Africa, the mission of hope and the spirituality of inculturation"* and *"A historical perspective on Spiritan mission"*. The symposium counted the presence of about one hundred and fifty participants and has its minutes published in *"Missão Espiritana"*, nº 2.

*"MISSÃO ESPIRITANA"* is the name of the magazine of the Spiritan lusophone circumscriptions, launched during the Spiritan Year. This magazine is born from the conviction that language is the voice of a certain culture and that, after faith, it is certainly a most unifying agent, that does not render uniform, but rather respects historical differences and others.

The Jubilee was also an opportunity to present the Mission through a missionary exposition - *"Enlarge the Space of your Tent"* - that took place here, Torre d'Aguilha. It was useful in showing that, since 1703, many were the men and women that funded a welcoming place of hope in the "tent" that the Spiritan missionaries have been building throughout the world. One of the most outstanding aspects treated in the exposition was the role of the woman in African cultures:

As a fruit of the commitment of some confreres and many lay friends, the *Media* gave great emphasis and coverage to the celebration of the 300 years of Spiritan mission. A public TV channel devoted five programs to different aspects of the Spiritan mission, and another private TV channel broadcasted two Eucharistic Celebrations and four special programs about the Spiritans, lasting 60 minutes each.

Five books were published during the Spiritan Year about spirituality and mission, in order to facilitate the study, reflection, meditation and divulgation.

**1.3. Universal Mission in the local Church** - Besides the reference to "our" lay people working in the missionary animation in their parishes with different initiatives and enthusiastic commitment, it is important to highlight the attitude of the Portuguese bishops who, in Episcopal Conference, honoured us with two acts of great emphasis and importance: the approval of the statutes of our lay Movements (LIAM - Intensifying League of Missionary Action, MOMIP - Missionary Movement of Teachers, JSF - Youth Without Borders) and the Pastoral Note "Move into the deep, with the strength of the Spirit. The 300 years of the missionaries of the Holy Spirit".

In order to better serve the needs of the local church we are going to return to the diocese the parish of S. Domingos de Rana, entrusted to us more than 50 years ago; this will enable us to take over another parish that we are going to create in Abóbada, exactly in the area next to Torre d'Aguilha, an area experiencing extremely fast urbanization.

**1.4. Intercultural Festival: with immigrants on the stage** - An initiative born three years ago in the Seminary of Torre d'Aguilha, in order to assemble on the one heart and one soul the immigrant peoples from different continents, races, cultures, among whom the Spiritan community and the Chaplaincy of the Africans (entrusted to the Spiritans) have been committed.

In the Year of the Jubilee, the Feast was celebrated in partnership with the local civil administration of Cascais, as well as with the Spiritan movements, in a special way CEPAC - Centre Fr. Alves Correia - and the JSF that had a very significant role in this event.

**1.5. Youth planet in Mission** - The youth section of our missionary animation, called Youth without Borders (JSF), showed great commitment in all the celebrations of the Jubilee, giving them colour, rhythm and vitality. Besides the natural worth of investing in the youth, we are happy to see some of them adhering to the missionary volunteer movement and even some entering the Congregation.

In the Spiritan Youth Journeys of the European region that met in Paris from July 13th to 20th, 2002, there were more than 120 youth, 40 of whom were Portuguese.



## 2.0. SPIRITUAL AND COMMUNITARY DYNAMISM: REACTIVATING THE CHARISM

We launched the Spiritan Year with the conviction that the capacity of looking into our living reality aimed at an authentic expression of our charism in today's world.

**2.1. Back to the Future** - The Province is conscious of the responsibility of "provoking" all confreres to *"adhere to an ongoing formation so that we are faithful to our vocation in the Church and in the world"* (SRL.142). Such fidelity needs to revisit the original intuitions of the founders and to understand the challenges of today's mission. The Spiritan Year, prompting us to the future, but keeping our eyes in the past, helped us to be more aware that Ongoing Formation is a decisive element of a qualified spirituality.

**2.2. Community is built** - The elaboration and evaluation of the community project is a privileged instrument in the process of giving dynamism to Community Life. During the Spiritan Year, all communities were requested to evaluate their project and to clarify their specific goals. In the same way, it was insisted in the careful preparation of community meetings, and in the evaluation of the services of the superior and the bursar.

**2.3. Seniority, a richness to be integrated** - From May 15th to 22nd, 2002, 50 European Spiritans, all above 65 years of age, came on a visit/pilgrimage to Fatima and to the different houses of the Province. It was a great joy to welcome the confreres in the communities they visited. The letters with a word of thanks and happiness for this initiative only recently stopped coming in. Many said that for them this was the strongest moment of their Spiritan Jubilee, because it meant that our older confreres were not forgotten.

## 3.0. - PARTENERSHIP AND MISSION ANIMATION -

The Province has a long and concrete tradition of missionary involvement in the Church of Portugal, which started 67 years ago with the movement LIAM. Such involvement meant that, in the course of time, other movements and initiatives came to



exist. As it was recognized in the EPC/2003, it can be said that the Jubilee environment strengthened and clarified much of the work done for and with the lay people and other institutions:

**3.1. Mission with passion** - It was organized in Fatima, from February 14th to 16th, 2003, the first Meeting of Missionary Spirituality. Around 500 persons got together: confreres, Spiritan Sisters, and lay people from our different movements, besides other friends. There were great moments of prayer and study, with some addresses about the Holy Spirit in the Church and in Mission, as well as the sharing of testimonies and plays by the youth. The special contribution of this meeting was the challenge posed to everyone: the missionary is defined not so much as a man/woman of action, rather as man/woman of passion!

**3.2. Laity: partners in Spirit and in Mission** - One of the most outstanding points of the celebration of the Jubilee is, no doubt, the commitment and the enthusiasm of the "*Spiritan lay people*". The active participation in the different official events was extremely positive. However, even more significant were the actions (celebrations, vigils, campaigns...) organized and carried out by the laity, older and younger, in their own parishes and dioceses.

**3.3. With the power of the Spirit** - The Jubilee was an opportunity to extend the *newly-born CESM - Holy Spirit and Mission Centre* - thought first of all as a framework of formation and spirituality for the Spiritan Family, but also aimed at supplying the youth, religious, priests and couples, a renewal by the strength of the Spirit.

#### **4.0. - "THERE IS HOPE FOR YOUR FUTURE" (Jer 31,17)**

This motto was the inspiration for the EPC/2003, lived in the aftermath of the Jubilee Year. The Province started the Jubilee celebration conscious of the need of fighting the tendency of fearing the future and keeping to a contemplation of the glorious past. To stop is to die. There is a need of inventing the future.

**4.1. The joyful and contagious witness generates new life** - The most precious of all great events of the Jubilee was the priestly ordination, in their parishes of origin, of four young Spiritans: three of them in 2002 and the other in 2003. Significantly, these four

young men are from parishes entrusted to the pastoral care of Spiritans (3 in Portugal and 1 in Cape Verde).

In September 8th, 2003, there were four novices who made their first profession. This was a key point in closing the Jubilee Year.

**4.2. Initial Formation: interculturality and solidarity** - The Province welcomed the decision taken by the European Region of opening the European Noviciate in 2004, and reaffirmed its determination in continuing to receive students from other circumscriptions (the community of the 2nd cycle of formation has 12 young Spiritans from 8 nationalities; next year, the number of nationalities can rise to 11). The Province has a young professed member studying theology in Nairobi and another one in Madrid. Since two years ago, there is a confrere from the southern hemisphere working on the formation team. One of the confreres from the South, who has finished his formation in the Province, has just received his first appointment to Portugal.

**4.3. Spiritan Vocation Centre/CVE** - We already knew it, but the dynamism of the Spiritan Year made it even more explicit: to promote vocations is more a matter of "generation of life" than of recruitment. Our witness is the most precious gift that we can offer to the youth. In the EPC/2003, it was decided that the promotion of vocations should continue to be a priority of the Province, in its twofold component of awakening vocations and accompanying the young men in their answer to the call. For this aim, the Spiritan Vocational Centre was created.

**4.4. Lay Spiritans: an emerging dynamism** - Three aspects were particularly worked out concerning the Spiritan laity: careful formation for a pre-established itinerary, more lay involvement in the Spiritan movements, and entrusting the responsibility for ministry to a lay missionary animator.

It was in the aftermath of the Jubilee that three lay persons (two married men and a single woman) made their contract of lay associates. A good number of other lay people made the cycle of formation and expressed their desire of committing themselves in the same way.

**4.5. Managing change with hope and solidarity in Mission** - The management of the human and material resources has certainly demanded a lot of discernment and some risks. We

recognize that our human resources are limited (in terms of the number, the age, and the specialized technical competence) and that means that we cannot count on the professed members alone. Assistance to the dependent confreres is assured through a partnership with an association of social solidarity that operates a "foyer des anciens" in a Spiritan building. Last summer, a former minor seminary was converted into a professional school for handicapped. The administration of Torre d'Aguilha, as a house receiving different groups of people, is administered by a lay female manager.

## FRUITS OF THE SPIRITAN YEAR ?

The seed seems to be well spread abroad and well received, be it in the interior of the Province, be it among friends and co-operators, be it even in different dioceses.

The inquiry carried out in the Province in preparation for the EPC/2003 showed the confreres' esteem for the enriching experience of the Spiritan Year, particularly noted in the appeals to a renewed spirituality and in the new blood that went through all the channels of our missionary animation.

There are two convictions that seem to have become more and more concrete in the hearts of the confreres and of the Spiritan laity: that the missionary is the first "mission land" and, that of dissipating the impression that "the specifically Ad Gentes mission seems to be in a slowing down phase" (RM2).

From the Spiritan Year we welcome the threefold appeal: **"revive the gift you receive"** for if each one of us **"lives with authenticity the Spiritan charism"** there is certainly **"hope for your future!"**.



## CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION

Antonio Gruyters

*Antonio was a missionary in Brazil for many years. Among his many tasks over his years there he served as novice director. He was ordained in 1963 and at the moment he is a member of the provincial council in Holland. In this account he outlines the extraordinary things God can do through people who in their lives live the reality of the Gospel. Such people allow themselves to be guided by God present in the world and in the hearts of those they encounter in their daily lives.*

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**The real missionary is a contemplative in action.**

I knew several who lived like that. One of them was Fr. Ângelo van Kempen. I lived with him between 1970 and 1982.

In 1969 when I arrived in Brasília, the new capital of Brazil, the area was a huge building site. Ângelo moved to live in the midst of the poor during one of the so-called invasions which took place on one of the principal entry points of the city. He had no great pretensions. Even then, to use a biblical expression "the entire city of Jerusalem was alarmed". His action forced the local church in Brasília and the religious Congregations which fought amongst themselves to get the best sites in the new capital to question themselves.

Ângelo took the option for the poor very seriously even though he did not trust very much the fancy ideas of some liberation theologians. He believed that religious were much too protective of themselves. He recognised in the poor his masters and teachers. One could see in him the gift of interior liberty and joy. He insisted in giving a good welcome to all who knocked on his door (and they were many), without making distinction between people. He used say "When you welcome all in the same way, the rich feel offended and the poor don't know what's happening".



During this “invasion” of around 100 thousand people Ângelo took lodging in a small room in a wooden hut which belonged to the Saint Vincent de Paul Society. There was only room for the bed, a chair, a bag on the ground and a basin. The lizards ran happily along the edges of the bed. In the same hut three abandoned women and 16 children also took up residence.

The military government decided to remove the invaders. True, the city needed this cheap work-force but it should not be so visible that they become an eye-sore. The removal of 100 thousand poor people began. With all their belongings they were put onto trucks under all kinds of weather conditions and were taken to a savannah area 30 kms. away.

Ângelo found himself moving from place to place, doing whatever was possible to make this migration process more human. These were people who night and day worked to build in the middle of the mud or the dust their huts made of planks, cardboard and tin. In that upland a new city grew from the earth – Ceilândia, Resurrection parish. There was a shortage of everything: electricity, transport, and especially water. However there was no shortage of children who overfilled the few schools the government had built. Violence suffered became violence practised: fights for a place in the bus, fights in the lines to get a can of water, fights because of the over-abundant use of the local brew. Such fights ended frequently in deaths. The crime rate increased amongst youth.

It was an extremely poor parish of 100 thousand inhabitants. No meeting rooms, no church, nothing. The only way out was to make the best of the situation. However for Ângelo money was secondary. He used say “we have all we need”. He himself lived this value: as if only by being poor could we be universal brothers, eating and drinking what was served to us. He used say that the poor teach us to give value to small things. But that in order to understand this teaching we need to be converted. It is difficult to understand abundance as being of no importance and poverty as a richness. We are often demanding of the poor while at the same time we make few demands of the rich. We lose

patience about unimportant things (we refuse to lessen our authority) while at the same time we have an admirable patience when we meet up with the injustices practised against the weak. According to Ângelo, that was not the attitude of Jesus.

He believed that resources from outside should be curtailed to the absolute necessity. For him, to be also poor as church was a value and not a defect. Money from outside destroyed a lot of things. A poor church needs to be creative, it needs to trust more the capacities of the people, it needs to move more slowly.

Contemplation in action: Ângelo would have smiled at these very pompous words if they were used to describe his life. However he was without any doubt a contemplative in action. He found God in the poor: all of his life was directed towards them. They were the narrow door through which, daily, he entered the Reign of God.

In his pocket he always carried a paper on which he noted the problems which needed to be resolved as a matter of urgency. No matter how much he crossed out things on the top of the list it continued to become longer. In the midst of so much misery and violence he tried in a practical and simple way to diminish suffering with the help of an ever increasing group of collaborators. Ângelo had a special gift of creating friendship as well as an apostolic spirit in the community of pastoral agents which grew up around him: we the younger Spiritans, some sisters, married couples and former priests. It was a community which evangelised without using words. Faith communities organized themselves from a hundred bible circles. This was a popular method to make oneself contemplative in action. It was there that I learned to read the Bible. At the same time the people grew in their church commitment and in their socio-political engagement.

For Ângelo it was obvious that to become incarnated in the reality of the poor was a work of grace and required love above all else: in a simple way, without much talk and without ostentation. It was no varnish-covered love: He could feel indignation against everything which was done to crush the poor. But he did not harbour hate.

Love leads to identification, to move ones social location, to move ones class mentality and even ones clerical mentality in order to be with the poor. Jesus invites us to be where he is, not to “have an experience” and then to run away looking for a sabbatical year so that afterwards one can have another “experience” etc... without even incarnating oneself, which is a basic consideration for any evangelisation.

Obviously there were problems. As religious living amongst the poor we should be invisible like salt. As priests and members of the hierarchy we could not always be in a privileged place invested with power.

Ângelo showed that our baptism takes place when we patiently lose ourselves in the lives of the poor. They helped us to see the deficiencies of our formation; they taught us a spirituality of which we had thought that we were the experts. Many of the poor live love. They know that they have little or no control over what may crash in on their lives. There is much sin amongst the poor, but without doubt what is much more impressive for those who know how to contemplate it is the great holiness of the People of God.

Our way of thinking is not changed by doing courses. It is moved by basic experiences: living, eating, drinking, moving around, opting to be on the side of the poor. It is not sufficient to support a popular movement from a distance with a sympathy which runs no risks. Nothing can substitute direct action however small it may be. This is the way to become a contemplative in action without making an effort to spiritualise our action.

In this way a federation of communities grew up in Ceilândia, Resurrection parish with its own face, a dusty face, perhaps the face of Fr. Ângelo. In 1982 he left there; the years began to weigh on him. He moved to a smaller place. In 1991 he returned to Holland where he was killed by a drug addict who had got into the Spiritan house where Ângelo lived. This happened in February of 1996.

We can go back in time and look at that time of grace which today seems so distant. In Ceilândia only the older people remember Father Ângelo and the style and the work of the Spiritans. The dreams of liberation have evaporated. The Church became engaged in a fight against the avalanche of Pentecostal groups and of the so-called secularised society. A new clergy, for the most part Brazilian, now knows nothing of the Church of Medellin and Puebla. Religious and especially religious working with the poor have not increased because the formation of young religious has not been carried out in the midst of the poor and using the experience of the poor. Religious institutes have taken on a liberationist language, but not a liberationist practice. The poor are more passive and more disorganized than ever. The Church is being tempted to follow the more easy road which offers a charismatic menu in order to compete with the Pentecostal groups. Ceilândia is a religious melting pot with hundreds of churches and Afro-Brazilian worship places.

At the far end of Ceilândia there is still a community of three Spiritans: a German, a Brazilian and a Dutch confrere. They continue the Spiritan presence which 35 years earlier had been started by Fr. Ângelo when he decided to move into the midst of the poor.

This community does not know if it will be able to remain there.



# THE VOCATION TO BROTHERHOOD IN THE CONGREGATION

Joseph C. Mba

Joseph is a brother from the Nigerian province and a specially invited guest to the Chapter. He made his perpetual commitment in the Congregation in 1991 and has fulfilled the roles of Bursar, Farm Manager, Assistant Provincial Bursar, Provincial Councilor and Regional Councilor. While regretting the decline in the presence of brothers in the Congregation, Joseph makes a strong plea for the continued validity of their role and suggests practical steps towards a way forward.

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## Spiritan Brotherhood

The vocation to the brotherhood in the Congregation is dwindling. Looking at the overall statistics, one cannot but agree that in a short time, membership to the brotherhood will be a thing of the past. One cannot deny that in Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, there is a 'vocations boom', especially to the priesthood.

Looking at the rate of increase in numbers to the priesthood in our Congregation, one cannot but ask what is happening to the Brotherhood. In fifty or sixty years from now will the Congregation still be able to boast of a reasonable number of brothers? This is a question that requires our honest reflection.

Let us examine the course of this sudden drop in membership to the brotherhood: Could it be that brothers are no longer relevant to the Congregation, that their apostolate is no longer needed by the Congregation or even by the Church at large? Could it be that their apostolate has become drab, archaic and unwanted by the Congregation, or perhaps the brothers have outlived their usefulness, thereby making their existence irrelevant?

Because of the aforementioned reasons, giving attention to the vocation of the brother in the Congregation is perhaps no longer necessary and we just have to let it die a natural death instead of trying to sustain its continuity.

### ***The need for Brotherhood in the Congregation and in the Church***

That there is need to sustain the vocation to the brotherhood cannot be over emphasised. The world needs the apostolate of the brother now more than ever. The Church is not less in need of the same apostolate. As for the Spiritan Congregation itself, the need for more brothers is obviously clear.

There are some areas of ministry and the apostolate for which the ordained priest may not be readily available because of other pastoral engagements exclusively reserved to him. Here the role of the brother is urgently needed. These areas include catechetics, education, hospital visitation, work with prisoners, refugees, technical and mechanical work etc...In the area of schools for example, a well trained brother involved in the school apostolate will bring to his work a level of devotion that an ordinary teacher may not have. Here in Nigeria, if the government decided to hand back schools to the Church, how many brothers could we release for that apostolate, and for how long would that last, looking at the present situation?

Another area worth mentioning is the refugee apostolate. Many refugees are languishing without being attended to properly. It is an area where the help of the brother is urgently needed. Since priests may be too busy to attend to this arm of the apostolate, brother can be a great help. But that is only if they are alive! I say this because the way things appear, vocations to the brotherhood are dying gradually.

## *The Way Forward*

Some of the possible ways forward are:

1. Let the vocation to the Brotherhood form part of the issues to be discussed at the General Chapter. In the Spiritan Congregation, the vocation to the brotherhood is part and parcel of the Congregation and can never be separated from our history. It is one of the branches belonging to the same tree. If the branch is allowed to die, the tree is no longer complete.
2. Set up a special vocations' team with brothers as members. The team should find ways of promoting the vocation to the brotherhood and sustaining its viability afterwards.
3. Periodic meetings of the Spiritan brotherhood worldwide might also be a step in the right direction. Various apostolates could be presented and reviewed, while at the same time drawing strength and inspiration from one another.
4. The presence of brothers at important Spiritan decision-making gatherings, such as the General Chapter, may also be a means of promoting their vocation. Looking at the list of delegates for the General Chapter, 2004, one should have expected that not less than five or more brothers would have been there. Unfortunately, this is not so.
5. Inclusion of Spiritan brothers as members of the General Council would also help them to share with their brother priests their life experiences and their missionary apostolate.

## *Conclusion*

Having explored, to some extent, the apparent dwindling of vocations to the brotherhood in the Spiritan Congregation, the likely causes and possible ways of reawakening this dynamic branch of the Spiritan tree, we must affirm that all hope is not lost; neither are we afraid of what is likely to happen in the future. It is a collective

effort and the responsibility of all of us to prune the branch, to enable it to continue to form part of the whole tree, and to launch out deeper in the world for a greater catch.



## THE TRANSMISSION OF THE SPIRITAN CHARISM TO YOUNG PEOPLE

Raymond Jung

*What is a charism? How do we understand the Spiritan charism? How can it be best conveyed to the young people of today, especially those who are asking to join us? These are the questions that Raymond Jung attempted to answer in his presentation, drawing on his many years of involvement in formation. Raymond belongs to the French Province and was ordained in 1973. He is presently the Director of novices in the European novitiate at Chevilly-Larue, near Paris.*

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The Spiritan year has thrown light on the fact that our heritage is not so much a possession to be preserved or a discipline to be taught, but rather a movement, a hope, a shared inspiration to be used in making choices and taking initiatives to answer the needs of our times – or perhaps a resource to bring about a new foundation. So our first duty is to be open to this gift, to find in it the inspiration to be able to “live in truth”. Then we must use it with courage and creativity in the situations we meet today. Finally, we have to pass it on to others so that it will continue to live and bring life to others.

The charism of a congregation is passed on by a study of its foundation and history in a life-plan and a spirituality, in a style of living together and by working for the Kingdom. I would like to raise a few questions on each of these points that flow from my experiences as a novice master.

### **Studying our Foundation**

The charism of the Congregation cannot be passed on without a study of our foundations and a knowledge of the founders, because it is through their lives, their spiritual experiences and their work that the project and the mission of the Congregation is revealed.

The first difficulty is the passage of time which separates us from our founders. Many become quickly discouraged by this. The work

done in recent years helps us to overcome this historical difficulty and enter more easily into their human and spiritual experiences. Each one can now appreciate the witness of their lives, the way they answered basic questions, dealt with trials, listened carefully to the people of their time and continuously talked with God about the events through which they were living.

It is more than a work of history: it is rather **a meeting with real people** that is presented and the young react as they would when talking with others face to face. They will find some things to admire, but others that will annoy them or appear unacceptable or incomprehensible; but our founders do not just tell us things we are happy to hear.

There are things that strike home. The experiences of Poullart des Places encourage the novices to get to know themselves and to be discerning, while also increasing their trust in God to see things more clearly and to commit themselves in response to his call.

Sometimes, their own experience confirms that of the founder. Once, when we were talking about the decision of Poullart to go and live with the poor students in March 1703, a novice added his own story. During his stage, he had spent the first years in a parish and the second, at his own request, in a centre for street children. His judgement was as follows: "It is one thing to *do* something for the poor, but it is something else to *live* with them". In other words, he had lived this passage in the flesh and could testify to the difficulty of what Poullart did.

But at other times, the incomprehension presented an opportunity to go deeper into the meaning. For example, the decision of Poullart to renounce the money given by his father and accept only the 60 livres given by the Bishop to the poorest seminarians raised many questions for the novices, both from the North and the South. Why did he do this when he was just starting his work and spending all his waking hours looking for funds? The difficulty led to a reading in faith, entering into the deep motivations of Claude:

- this seminary would not be his work but God's;
- he did not start it to satisfy his ambition or to prove his own worth;
- above all, the kind of priests he wanted to produce would renounce searching for lucrative benefices to be at the

service of the poor and humble. That is the sort of priest he was himself.

Money would come, not by means of a clever strategy but by the confidence he would inspire in people through the quality and strength of his commitment. He did not shrink from the work that needed to be done, even if it was humiliating for a man of his background.

This witness of poverty has managed to cross the centuries that have elapsed since that time. To accept it today does not mean turning the clock back to a mythical past which will provide solutions to contemporary problems; it is rather a question of letting ourselves be challenged as to the way we relate to our work, the attitudes we have and the choices we are making today. It can be a source of inspiration when we are suffering from a certain impoverishment in the North or looking for ways to achieve financial autonomy in the South.

It is the same with Libermann. As with many other people who know him, the discovery of his life and writings helps the young people in their relationship with God and in learning to accept themselves and others - a relationship that takes into account their inherent weakness. Some, both from the North and the South, develop a real taste for his writings and find in him a spiritual guide to commit themselves to following "a way of peace".

Furthermore, Libermann placed great emphasis on sanctity and the gift of self for future missionaries. They must remain united to Christ, like the graft on the trunk of the tree, so that the sap of life can produce fruit; its strength will depend on the quality of this relationship (*Instructions to Missionaries*). This is why he opted for religious life and community: "*All the members will always live in community*" (*Règlements* of 1849). To do away with community life would be to lose our identity. It is the place where, through sharing and inter-action with others,

- natural tendencies are pruned back and become a strength for the whole group;
- the personal charism of each one is recognised and welcomed for the service of all;



- in prayer and reflection, the calls of God are discerned and the common mission is accepted and shared;
- those returning from mission can find rest, relaxation and give thanks for the work accomplished.

This “passage” through community life is very demanding and there is a big temptation to give priority to active work outside. But if we dispense ourselves from it because it is hard, what will we achieve of value outside? What will become of our missionary commitment? I think we are finding it increasingly difficult to follow Libermann along this path, both young and not so young: but it is an essential part of our identity and our charism.

From this study, there will also emerge an appreciation of the coherence of the vision of the founders, even if they were two in number. The missionary orientation that Claude Poullart des Places so much desired, gradually became a reality with the passage of time. Spiritans set out not just from Europe to other continents but from parishes to those who were outside its reach. Our charism urges us to go to those on the edge or, as our *Rule of Life* puts it, “to those who have not yet heard the Gospel message or who have scarcely heard it” (SRL 12). This orientation should underlie the activities of every Spiritan, even those whose mission is to care for a parish or communities already established. It has to be an essential part of the formation given to young confreres.

### **Entering into a particular style of living**

The charism of the Congregation is given flesh by the particular way in which, following our founders, we live out the Gospel and share in the mission of the Church. It takes its inspiration from the writings of our founders but is transmitted, above all, by our *Rule of Life*.

So our charism is passed on by a progressive initiation into the *Rule of Life*. The different stages of the elaboration of our Rule are looked at in order to understand that it is something dynamic that has developed throughout our history, being faithful to our tradition in a way that is both alive and creative. We examine what remains unchanged in the midst of successive movements of *aggiornamento*. We look for what gives coherence and unity to our way of life; we listen to what is said through the Gospels. So the novice becomes a disciple who gradually gets to know what constitutes the Spiritan way of life. He is expected to interiorise



these texts so that they become a reference point for his way of life and to listen attentively to what the Holy Spirit is saying to him through them.

This study is necessary. But my experience has been that real advances are made when the full meaning is understood and appreciated through events. For example, a novice can think that he has no trouble with the vow of poverty until somebody gives him a gift of money: it is only then that it is brought home to him that it is not as easy as he thought. Such an experience, when reflected upon with a guide, is worth more than a month of lectures.

As part of the study of the *Rule of Life*, we look for the essence of the charism of the Congregation and where it receives its expression in a striking way. But the danger would be to try to encapsulate it into a few phrases learnt by heart. Referring to other texts – like Chapter documents, texts for animating the Congregation, the witness of confreres living out the mission – helps to give a concept of the charism that is more correct. One day, we received a circular letter from a confrere at a time when the novices were reflecting on the charism. He was working with refugees in very difficult conditions and he stayed with them while most members of international aid organisations were moving out. Such a witness contributed as much to identifying the essence of Spiritan life as a more formal study of SRL.

However, it remains true that young people have difficulty in explaining our charism to other novices in their inter-novitiates. They find that the charism of other congregations is more easily expressed – teaching, looking after the sick, working with youth... They see that of Spiritans as too wide. In the past, missionaries went out to implant the Church in different places. In doing this, they inevitably got involved in many different areas, but the basic aim remained clear and coherent. Now, these Churches exist and our presence needs to be redefined in the light of our charism. But faced with the huge diversity of tasks with which Spiritans are engaged – first evangelization, mission in abandoned rural areas or on the outskirts of cities, care for street children and prisoners and refugees, inter-religious dialogue - young people are understandably a little frightened and they wonder for what exactly they should prepare themselves. In a world of increasing specialization where improvisation is frowned upon, they fear that they will never be

sufficiently prepared for what will be demanded of them. First appointment is more important than ever, because it is in answering the call that I discover who I am, what my place is in the shared mission – my personal charism.

### **Entering into a Community of Apostolic Life**

The style of life to which we have been referring has to be lived and incarnated; otherwise it remains a dead letter. The charism of the Congregation is carried forward in the way we live, the way we pray and participate in the mission of the Church and the whole Congregation. That which began through the power of the Spirit with the founders must be received, followed and developed by each succeeding generation in the different historical, social and cultural situations in which they find themselves. But it is the same gift which continues to act. It is not a question of returning to the time of our foundations, but rather of living the charism today as the founders would have lived it in our place: to dare to take new initiatives and run certain risks – in fidelity to the grace that has been given us. So helping a novice to discover our charism and live by it does not mean passing on an inheritance but introducing him into this dynamism in the steps of the founders.

To achieve this, you have to live with Spiritans; Formation then becomes an apprenticeship through experience. Today, it takes the form of living in Spiritan communities, undergoing a missionary stage and meeting others peoples and other cultures.

During these experiences, young people are going to feel the distance that exists between the idea and its concrete realisation in a particular community and a particular place. "Mission is not what you said it was"; this was the conclusion of one young Spiritan who wrote to me after 6 months of stage. This journey through disillusionment must be accompanied by a wise guide, to make progress in the acceptance of reality and the limitations of individuals and eventually to arrive at a greater maturity.

Some confreres are going to be seen as role models. As a formator, I sometimes hear of the influence of the witness of a particular confrere in the formation process, and it never ceases to be a source of wonder. But the reasons for the choice of a particular model can vary greatly. A confrere formator returned from the garage where he wasted a whole morning as the result of a

breakdown; seeing another confrere arrive in a beautiful new car, he said with a smile: "I don't have enough clout!". In the "model-market", which one will prove the most seductive? Formation also involves exposing false models. The ultimate guide is the one who will become the sole model – Jesus Christ. It is he who can turn our eyes to the "oppressed" and the "neglected", of whom SRL talks in no. 12.

During formation, some people decide to leave because they conclude they are not cut out for religious life. And yet they can still feel very much at ease with our charism and retain a strong desire to take part in our missionary work. This should prompt us to think about new forms of membership.

One final question: The arrival of a child has a great effect on a family and transforms its dynamic relationships. Something similar should happen with the arrival of novices into the Congregation. In the northern provinces, where the arrival of young people is more rare, what impact can they have? It used to be the younger generations that brought along new ideas and ways of looking at things. "Receiving novices does not mean primarily the arrival of new forces (even if that is true): above all, it means entering into a new way of seeing things together. One cannot be a religious without being open to accept what is different with gratitude. The arrival of a new person ...is not to be seen as the gaining of new skills and aptitudes; it is rather an invitation to strip off one's imagined strengths and certitudes to enter into another way of seeing things – the weakness of believing together". (Philippe Lécrivain: *Jeunes et Vocations*). Receiving young people and being willing to be influenced by them is one of the conditions to ensure that the charism we wish to pass on to them will have a chance of being life-giving for them.

A few concluding remarks:

- Formators are in the front line of this passing on of the charism, nevertheless everybody is concerned.
- If the novitiate is the special time for this transmission, it still continues into the later stages of formation and well beyond – in fact, throughout our missionary experience. My

identity is not something to be defended but to be put at risk in meeting others – especially those to whom I am sent. I will end up discovering my identity even better as a result of the encounter.

In his book *“Holy Anger”*, Lyta Basset says: *“God builds in us the capacity to give what we thought we had never received”*. The Spiritan Year was an opportunity to gratefully receive all we have been given by our founders and our three centuries of history. With this realisation, perhaps we in turn will become more capable of generously passing on the life-giving things that we have received.



# TRANSMISSION OF THE SPIRITAN CHARISM

Peter Kofi Laast

*Peter is a member of the West African Province and was ordained in 1989. In his treatment of the Spiritan charism he brings a wealth of experience from various ministries in formation including that of Assistant Novice Master, Director of 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle Formation and Councillor for Formation in WAP. Of particular value are Peter's first-hand personal insights into the problems and challenges of formation, as well as his practical orientations and recommendations.*

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## *Introduction*

As an introduction to this topic, I would like to share with you some vignettes. I have had the privilege of listening to about 200 life-stories of confreres in formation.

Statement One “ At the end of my initial formation, I am still grappling with what exactly our charism is”.

Statement Two “ I joined the Spiritans because they are well respected, popular and famous and not necessarily to be a missionary”

Statement Three “ By and large, religious Congregations are basically the same, except perhaps in terms of their apostolate and by chance I happen to be a Spiritan”.

Despite the fact that these statements reveal some mixed motivations and confusion in the minds of the young Confreres in their vocation to the Congregation, one can recognize the elements of transparency and openness as striking features in the statements. For this reason a lot of work needs to be done in

educating the young to recognize the various Spiritualities of the Congregation and its specific charism.

I shall develop my reflection on this topic along the following outline:

1. A simple reflection on Charism and Spiritan Charism.
2. My personal experience in SIST community.
3. Ways of transmitting the Spiritan Charism
4. Finally I will offer a brief conclusion.

### **What is the Spiritan Charism?**

When we talk of the Spiritan charism we are simply underlying the treasures and heritage we have received from our founders – Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Mary Paul Libermann. These treasures, or “double charism”, are summarized in the following words: “the evangelisation of the poorest, that is our general aim. However, the missions are the principal objects of our work and in the mission we have chosen the most miserable and most abandoned souls “ (N. D XIII. 170).

Attention to the poorest and most abandoned is at the heart of Claude Poullart des Places and Francis Libermann. The Handbook testifies, that “Evangelisation” and “the Poor” are elements we look out for in discerning Spiritan engagements in the contemporary world. In answering questions such as, “What is Spiritan work?” “How can a work be termed as “Spiritan”? “What does it mean to say that we are advocates of the poor”? We must look out for whether the work has the aim to evangelise, and whether the beneficiaries of that work are the poor.

The “apostolic life” is at the heart of the Spiritan Charism. It embraces two aspects: “availability before the Lord” and “availability before humanity”. “Availability before our Lord” requires that we place and dispose ourselves before God. Our Venerable Father built his entire life around the principle, “God is all”. He never established himself permanently anywhere but always wanted to know the path God wanted him to follow. “Availability before the Lord” is captured in the words of the prophet Isaiah,

“Here I am, Lord”. It remains incomplete unless it is matched with “availability before humanity”. This later (availability before humanity) is expressed in the following, “Send me”. This is what evangelical availability means, “Here I am Lord, send me”. Unfortunately for some Spiritans today, our evangelical availability is no longer “Here I am Lord, send me”, rather “Here is my wish, Lord, send me”. This has rippling effects on our desire to go out on mission. I would like to invite you to reflect on these three basic questions: Why are some young Spiritans refusing to go on mission? Why are older confreres suspicious and slow in accepting and understanding the young ones in our various communities? Are our formation houses answering the needs of the Congregation as they did in the past?

## **Personal Experience**

In 1996, I was appointed the Director of Formation of our community of formation in SIST. I came into a system that had varied conceptions of who a formator was. A formator was a disciplinarian, policeman, baby-sitter, etc. My first task was gradually to decode the psyche of the young confreres to a more acceptable concept; that a formator is rather an accompanier in the formation process. His primary role is to affirm and encourage them in their gifts as well as to challenge them to grow, to be in touch with themselves, the traditions and charism of the Congregation. The task of accompaniment and discernment are key factors in the on-going ministry of formation. In SIST community, we are dealing with about 75 candidates with an average age of 30 years. A good number have been in vows for 4-9 years. Some have already taken their final vows while a small number are deacons preparing for priestly ordination. At this stage of their final initial formation a good number of student-confreres have built up their personalities, insulated themselves, and only release information they think is safe.

My seven years in SIST/ SIFCA ushered me into a new awareness of the great impact of personal stories of candidates on religious formation. While personal stories influence us, I have also

discovered and continue to discover that the influence is beyond what we can imagine. By detecting a pattern in the life story of a candidate, you have acquired a base from which you, the formator, begin to accompany the faith-journey of the candidate. Each individual story is sacred, personal, cherished full of insights to be explored for the good of the candidate. The unique personal story or history of the candidate is enhanced by mutual trust, respect and acceptance of the community of growth. The one-to-one accompaniment on a regular basis is the bulk of the ministry of the formator. It is the key element in the formation process, the main vehicle by means of which a candidate is helped through a progressive process of assessment, discernment, internalisation, integration and growth. What we try to do in this process is to lead the candidate to recognize his mixed motivations and to lead him to discern the will of God.

My experience in all these is that some candidates find it difficult to talk about themselves and one can get the impression that they are holding on to something; the fear of self-disclosure. Generally, student-confreres want to grow and develop, but do not want to be disturbed. There is something in all of us that fights against challenging the status-quo. We prefer settling for an easier and a less challenging environment.

### *Transmitting the Spiritan Charism*

It is important to reflect on the impact of community on the formation process. We must recognise that the community is the locus par excellence where the Spiritan charism is transmitted. The community has the power to form. Candidates therefore can conform or be transformed by the community. This is the reason why we must give genuine attention to the prevailing ethos of our communities of formation. Our communities are the centre for visible activities that enhance or destroy our charism. Fraternity groups, community services and liturgical groups are some of the responses to the needs of the community due to the size of the community. For example, the introduction of small fraternity groups have brought confreres in each group closer, through regular



meetings and celebrations- developing interest of knowing one another and opportunity for our senior confreres in residence to journey with them to discover the riches of our heritage and treasures.

For the past years limited financial resources have been of great concern to our formation community of SIST. We have been running under a tight budget and we have always begun the academic year with a deficit. When the physical and social environment is tense because of the lack of the very basics for life, confreres do not eagerly respond to the formation process. SIST is turning out over fifty percent of our candidates for first appointment in the Congregation every year. We are therefore dealing with a matter that will have a great consequence for the life of the Congregation in the very near future.

Another distinguishable factor is the dominant clerical culture that has very little or nothing to do with religious life. To be in formation is co-terminus with becoming a priest. Religious life means very little in the thinking of our candidates. Priesthood comes with power and authority as is demonstrated by some of our senior confreres and this becomes a model for our young confreres. Traditionally, most of us understand ourselves in terms of being priests. Hence religious life means very little to us. It becomes a “private” devotion. Our Rule of Life tells us that we “respond to this call in a religious missionary Institute” (SRL 2). We have no choice but to grow into a strong identity as religious.

Candidates want to see formators who show consistency in their directions, decisions and behaviour. When this happens, they easily inspire and motivate the candidates and thereby become role models. The Congregation needs more of such formators who hand down the treasures of our Congregation even by their way of life. The impact that is created by such behaviour endures in the mind of the candidate forever. It is for this very reason that some of us still speak of some old religious missionaries who have made a lasting impression on us.

I have also recognized that the lack of a systematic programme to enhance or help formators in helping our young candidates in their formation in matters specifically Spiritan. The actual practice is that after the Novitiate, candidates study very little concerning the Congregation. This is a big lacuna in the process of forming our candidates to take on the task of Spiritan religious missionaries. If one is lucky with formators that are interested in Spiritan matters, they would tailor "spiritual conferences" to cover the writings of Libermann and des Places, the history of the Congregation, documents of the Congregation, etc. It is also important to listen to the life and experiences and faith of our founders and other Spiritan ancestors. A programme as important and necessary as this is left to the choice and resources of the formators. My private research has informed me that there is very little happening in this area. The result is that student-confreres do very little in specifically Spiritan formation. This implies that from the point of view of formation, we are forming very good religious missionaries, but they are not equipped with a spirituality that is specifically our own. It could be anything but not Spiritan. This is why I consider the efforts of the Pan-African Major Superiors and Formators to set up a work-group that would document a programme of a Spiritan Spirituality for use at every level of formation in our houses of formation very opportune, urgent and laudable. I find that such a programme will help us in a systematic transmitting of the values and treasures of the Congregation.

## Conclusion

Community building among young religious in formation is both a grace and a task. Thank God for the abundant vocations to the religious life. At the same time it is a task for all of us, formators, as community animators and student-confreres because everyone in the religious community is part of the formation process and part of any solution to problems within it.

## LAY ASSOCIATES IN THE IOF

Mary Ann Lam (Chooi Young Lam Wing Cheung)

*A religious charism that does not operate in the open air can easily be extinguished by a short circuit! The treasure we received from our founders is not the exclusive property of Spiritans: it is a gift to the whole Church which indicates a path of service and sanctity that is for all people. It is a treasure that can be found in different forms – a life lived in community, a spiritual experience, a missionary involvement. All will witness to this – Mary Ann Lam and the other Lay Associates of the IOF.*

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It is with great joy - and quite a bit of apprehension – that I take up this opportunity to address this impressive assembly. When Fr. Antonio Farias asked me to talk of my experiences as a Spiritan Lay Associate, my first reaction was that I was incapable of doing such a thing. But encouraged by the Spiritans of the Indian Ocean Region, I will try to give you some idea of what we live and how we feel. I will do this through different experiences of the Associates in the Indian Ocean.

**In Madagascar**, there are two associates: Gilbert, who is also called Ndrine, and Pascale, whose surname is Pépé. They are married and they have a little girl. Both are working with Spiritans in the NRJ centre for street children at Tananarive. Here are some extracts from the report they have given me:

“Pascale’s work is to accompany young marginalized people and to help them to reinsert into society and the world of work. It is a continuous meeting with them to make them more responsible and worthy of the name of Christ. Her work is carried out through an NGO which is called “Sentinelle” and she is one of those in charge at Tananarive.”

Gilbert has known the Spiritans since 1986. He followed the early stages of the Spiritan formation programme at Diego Suarez and in Mauritius. For five years he had contact with a variety of Spiritans

and he never forgot the life that he lived with them. Having decided to follow another life, he got married and eventually told his wife about his desire to live the missionary life as a lay person. When he re-established his contacts with the Spiritans, he discovered a new type of commitment – that of Lay Associate. He and his wife thought about this and they both felt a call from God.

After three years of training, Ndrine and Pépé made a commitment for three years in the Congregation. During the celebration, the Superior of the District handed them their letter of missionary appointment: it was to minister to the prisoners in the detention centre of Antanimora and to work for the rehabilitation of the children in the NGO “Sentinelle”.

“For us, this commitment is a decision which gives a missionary orientation to our daily work and our charism; it is a grace that helps us to develop our vocation. We also enjoy the advantage of the strong and fraternal life of our Congregation, of sharing and joyful discovery, of mutual help and support along the way. We place our trust in prayer and the graces that Jesus gives us. We love our community and we continue our journey discovering that ‘everything is grace’.”

**In the District of Réunion**, there are not yet any Associates in the strict sense, but there has been a significant renewal of the Spiritan Fraternity groups, with the possibility of more formal commitments later on.

- The Fraternity of St. Jacques is now adopting a more Spiritan character.
- The Fraternity of Rivières des Pluies has been set up under the guidance of Roger Tabard, the parish priest and the superior of the District. This place is connected historically with Père Monnet, the one-time Superior General of the Spiritans and an apostle to the slaves, to whom he devoted his life. It also has associations with Père Levavasseur and Pères Blanpin and Colin, contemporaries of Libermann. This Fraternity was founded with a distinct Spiritan and missionary flavour from the start.



- The Fraternity of St. Paul has been in existence for about a year. It is also an historical place: it was the original capital of the island and Père Monnet was also parish priest there.

These last two groups are in touch with the local Spiritan community.

**In Mauritius**, there are four Lay Spiritan Associates. Each met the Spiritans in very different ways but all four eventually felt that a commitment to the Spiritans was a call from the Lord.

Here is my own story. As a teacher, I have worked for nearly 20 years at the Catholic school of Pont Praslin. For the last 18 years, I have shared the life of the inter-religious Centre; one of its principal aims is to discover new ways of dialogue between different races, cultures and religions. I belong to the Chinese-Mauritian community and my work as a teacher has brought me close to pupils of the Hindu, Muslim and Christian faiths. The teachers also come from the different communities.

It is in this context that I try, in my own way, to respond to the missionary calling. I have had this call now for a long time, in fact precisely from the time when my father was baptised in 1986. It was then that I started to look for ways to live concretely the exigencies of my own baptism.

When the Centre came into existence, I started, not without some hesitation, to take part in the activities that were offered. I followed the different stages of formation that were designed to help us Christians to meet "those who believe otherwise" and gradually to change my way of relating to them. It helped us to rid ourselves of prejudices and to look positively at how people differ from each other. As the years went by, my missionary commitment took on a more solid form. In 1992, with five others, I pledged myself to serve Christ according to a rule of life adapted to our circumstances. This helped me in my work to help the children and relate to them differently. Now I organise inter-religious prayer sessions, especially towards the end of the year. I encourage the Catholic children to learn an eastern language.

All is not perfect; we live in a country where there is much discomfort and suffering. But one of the aspects of our faith in

Jesus Christ is the duty to share the suffering of other men and women who cross our path, ignoring what race or religion they belong to.

The studies I have done regarding mission and the spirituality of Libermann have greatly enriched my life and, after a long journey, I have grown in my personal prayer life. I appreciate the community life; the fact that men and women from different cultures can live together as a team is a real treasure and a priceless gift from God.

**A testimony from Ndrine and P  p   in Madagascar regarding their commitment.**

It is our own choice and it gives a missionary meaning to our daily work and helps us to live out our personal charism. It is a journey which helps us to deepen our conviction that in being concerned for the poorest people, we meet Christ himself (cf. Mat 25).

*Why Spiritan? Because in the past, Ndrine had greatly benefited from Spiritan community life. His serious accident in 1986 put him back in touch with his old Spiritan friends, who helped him to fill the void that he was experiencing within himself.*

*(Pascale – P  p  ): Personally, I knew nothing about the Spiritans. I hesitated for a long time and I only agreed because of my husband. But during the formation that lasted for three years, we felt the palpable action of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our work; the result was an attachment to prayer and an increased honesty in all our undertakings.*

**In Mauritius**, we have lived through the same things. Slowly, we have come to understand that we have to deepen our spiritual lives and rely on the support of a team in order to respond adequately to the call of the Lord. During our formation, we have tried to discover the Spiritan spirituality and nourish ourselves on the letters of Fr. Libermann and the example of P  re Laval; we have come to appreciate Jacques Laval as a man who put Christ at the very centre of his life and devoted himself to the poor people who were crushed by society.

We feel called to live out our vocation in the heart of the Church in Mauritius. We see this mission as a dialogue between men and women coming from different cultures. Christians are a minority

and must witness to their faith in a milieu of Hindus and Muslims. We know that henceforth, we must have a different approach to the religion of others and rid ourselves of our many prejudices regarding them.

## Conclusion

What do we expect of the Congregation?

Pépé and Ndrine: *"What we look for from the community is help in living our own particular vocation, helped by their prayers and fraternal union. The Congregation received us with open arms. We are often involved in activities that are difficult and constantly changing: prayer is the means by which we can face up to this. We remain open to other works that may be given to us by the Spiritan community."*

In Mauritius: *"We look to the Congregation for spiritual support. We also want it to help us cultivate a concern for the poorest and a great openness to those who do not share our faith."*

## THE LAY SPIRITANS OF EUROPE

Jean-Pierre Roesch

*Many people today are joining the Spiritans in Africa, America and Europe to share their charism in the service of the universal mission of the Church. But what exactly do they expect from professed Spiritans? They are not looking for structures but for nourishment; they are not searching for a new way of believing but a backbone that will strengthen them in their lives as baptised Christians. This is what emerges from this presentation by Jean-Pierre Roesch, who was representing all the branches of lay Spiritans in Europe.*

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Although I am a lay associate, I represent at the General Chapter all branches of the Spiritan Laity in Europe; they are numerous and varied, according to their different activities and different countries. I will share with you my own experience of coming to the Spiritans and journeying with them. Thus I hope to express what draws me, what enriches me and what my mission is. I will finish with a summary of the meeting of lay French associates and that of the European laity held in Bouveret, Switzerland, this year, where a motion was drawn up to be presented to this chapter, expressing their expectations.

I was born in 1946 in Saverne, birthplace of Fr. Libermann. I am a widower and have two children. I took early retirement from the National Police force, where, for the last 15 years, I was in charge of the Criminal Brigade of Strasbourg.

Some might think it was easy for me to know Fr. Libermann and the Spiritans since I was born in Saverne and used to live, in my youth, in Fr. Libermann Street. But no, my interest in Fr. Libermann and his attraction for me does not date from those days. Due to my studies and work I left Saverne for Paris, then went to Nantes. It was on the occasion of my wife's death in Nantes in 1981 that I returned to my parents' home in Saverne with our two young



children. One Sunday, at the end of the Mass at the Spiritan community's house in Sr. Florent in Saverne, the then superior, Fr. Litschgi, asked for people to become readers. I was the only one to go forward. Gradually I became more involved. I was asked to take charge of the Association of "*Friends of Fr. Libermann*" after the sudden death of its president. Accompanied by Fr. Arthur Bohn, spiritual chaplain of the association, I became steeped in the life and spirituality of Fr. Libermann.

At that time, I must admit, my life wasn't exactly easy, and Fr. Libermann quickly became my guide and spiritual master. I experienced for myself how he hadn't spoken in a vacuum, that he had always kept his feet on the ground and that his spirituality was relevant for today's world. So many problems find their solution when we let ourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit, when we are docile to him. Fr. Libermann helped me to love the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Blessed Trinity, to deepen my prayer life and, above all, to wait for the moments of God. My wife and I had been full of projects just after we had finished building a house in Nantes, and it was precisely at that moment that she was called to the Lord, after a long illness.

After the association of the "*Friends of Fr. Libermann*" a new fraternity was created in Saverne and I immediately joined it. Then came the General Assemblies of the fraternities and the European meetings of Lay Spiritans. All of that led me to become more rooted in God, in such a way that I didn't want to stay put but felt myself led further on. So I offered my services, my talents and my gifts to the Congregation. The then provincial, Fr. Christian Berton and his assistant, Fr. Gabriel Myotte Duquet, offered me the job of bursar in the Spiritan House in Saverne. I accepted. I have been considerably enriched by the contact with Spiritan confreres and by life in community, and I think the feeling is reciprocal. I had also been taking part for some time in the meetings of lay associates. On the occasion of one of these, at the end of 2003, I made a public commitment: in a beautiful ceremony, held in the community chapel and surrounded by many Spiritans and friends, I was officially handed a letter giving me a mission.

As for the associates, there are four of us in France. The three others work in Auteuil. We have a project whose spiritual and apostolic inspiration springs from the Spiritan Rule of Life, to which we are publicly committed.

At our last European meeting held in Bouveret at the end of April this year, we drew up a motion to be presented at the General Chapter.

This motion begins with an introduction, has three points, and ends with a conclusion.

### *Introduction*

Gathered at Gentinnes (Belgium) from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2003, the European Commission of Lay Spiritans reflected on the spirituality proper to them. We tried to answer the question: what is the exact nature of the Lay Spiritan? We emphasise the following points:

- a) With regard to our contact with professed Spiritans, with the Congregation as such, we came to the conclusion that there could not be Lay Spiritans without the Congregation; we Lay Spiritans feel we are members of the Congregation even if our condition gives us a particular place.
- b) Spiritan spirituality is essential: our movement is first of all a willingness to live our baptismal life in the setting of this spirituality. It is this that gives a particular colour to our Christian identity and distinguishes us from other movements.

During our meeting in Bouveret from the 29<sup>th</sup> April to the 2<sup>nd</sup> May our Commission examined the meaning of our apostolic vocation.

- c) This apostolic action is done in collaboration with the Spiritans according to their specific charism. That means, first of all, attention to the poor, those wounded by life, the abandoned, but also attention to those who haven't hear, or scarcely heard, the Gospel message, and also commitment

to tasks for which the Church has difficulty in finding apostolic workers.

A spiritual life that is specifically Spiritan and an apostolic action according to the criteria of the Spiritan charism are the two pillars of the Lay Spiritans.

### *Three Points*

1. Taking into account the evolution of the Congregation in Europe, we are happy that it is putting the accent increasingly on “missionary projects in Europe” and that it is investing international teams of professed members in them. These projects are just as missionary as those of the past in other continents, for it is the Mission and not geography that is the determining factor.

We think that this new orientation is both an opportunity and an invitation for us, the laity, to put into practice our work on Spiritan spirituality that can lead to a missionary dynamic in close union with our professed brothers.

2. The existence of groups of Lay Spiritans, in all their diversity according to the different Provinces, and their links with the Congregation, demands from the Congregation a special attention:
  - a) We belong to the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and have our place in it. We are conscious that we must reflect further on what our place is in the Congregation, including in its very structures. This reflection falls first of all to the lay people themselves, but it is also the work of the professed members. Better still, it is the task of professed and lay together.
  - b) If the Lay Spiritans are part of the Congregation, in their own way, they must be able to count on its being concerned for them. This is especially true of the superiors, whether provincial or local. A regular evaluation is needed on the part of all, superiors

and laity, especially in what concerns the work of the professed members who accompany us more directly. These are often called "pastoral assistants".

3. We are happy and proud that three "Lay Spiritan Associates" are able to take part in the General Chapter and we wish to thank in particular those three brothers and sisters who have accepted to dedicate one whole month to be thus associated with the Congregation, not only to reflect on questions touching directly on the Spiritan laity, but also to share in the very diverse issues concerning the wider Congregation.

### ***Conclusion***

We are convinced that Spiritan Lay membership is a new branch of the Spiritan tree. It is an old tree, but one which is called regularly to new growth.

We are very conscious of the fact that we have not yet finished the process of reflection on our own identity and on our place within the Congregation.

In terms of the Spiritan categories of thought to which we are attached, let us reflect and act "with one heart and one mind", and let us wait "actively for God's moment", according to the expression of Fr. Libermann and according to the spirit of Claude François Poullart des Places.



## A REPORT BY THE LAY SPIRITANS OF NORTH AMERICA

Joy Warner

*Joy was among the group of three Lay Associates who attended the General Chapter. She is a member of the province of Transcanada and she made her perpetual commitment in 1999. Joy is the coordinator of the Transcanada Spiritan Office for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation. She is regional coordinator for KAIROS Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, a national project of all the mainline churches in Canada which deliberates on issues of common concern, advocates for social change and joins with people of faith and goodwill in action for social transformation. She also chairs the Campus Ministries Council of McMaster University which is an advisory board for the ecumenical chaplaincy.*

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Perhaps our most exciting development since the Maynooth General Chapter is the adoption by all 4 North American Provinces of the following

### ***Lay Spiritan Vision Statement***

*We envision a community, in touch with the signs of the times, refusing to be "stuck in the notions of the past". A community so trusting of the Spirit, that it does not offer the least resistance to where the Spirit's breath may carry it. A community open and guided by the Holy Spirit in sharing its life, mission and spirituality. We envision a community, brought together through the prompting of the Spirit, to give options to those who are most poor, vulnerable and excluded from society, enabling them to break out of their cycle of misery.*

*We envision a community, united in heart and soul. A community of professed and Lay Spiritans, whose interior spirit allows for*

*openness, simplicity and gentleness with each other in working together to build God's reign of Love, Justice and Peace.*

This statement of shared values will now be included in the Lay Spiritan Associate's manuals of USA WEST, USA EAST, CANADA and TRANSCANADA. It is the fruit of several years of meetings and discussions and we are delighted that we are now united in a common vision although the particulars of how this vision is lived out will vary from province to province.

I will try to give you a snapshot of the Lay Spiritan reality in the 4 provinces of North America who meet together annually in alternating locations.

### **USA West Province**

What has emerged in the Western Province is a community-oriented formal Lay Associates program made up of a core group of lay men and women who are interested in applying Spiritan spirituality to their daily lives. Rather than focusing on particular projects or ministries, the USA West Lay Associates seek to live in practical union with God wherever the Spirit leads them.<sup>10</sup> people have made a formal commitment and two more are in formation. Current priorities are to increase prayer and devotion to the Holy Spirit, and greater awareness of Francis Libermann. Challenges are maintaining energy and interest among the Lay Spiritans for Lay Spiritan meetings and work when each person has their own diverse involvements in parish and other activities. Plans for the future include a focus on prayer, spiritual growth and sharing so that there is a greater sense of community and value in their meetings.

Some members are also active in Black Unity & Spiritual Togetherness (B.U.S.T.), founded by Fr. McKnight C.S.Sp. This organization works closely with FONKOZE, a program of economic development for rural Haitians.

Mike Latino reports "As we continue our growth in numbers and spirituality within our Lay Spiritan group, we thank God for the

richness we have received through our association with the members of the Holy Spirit Seminary and the Congregation in general. We truly believe that the "Spirit of the Lord is on us".

## USA East

The Province's engagement with laymen and women during the 70s and 80s as primarily through the lay missionary program in Africa. In 1989 Ann Marie and John Hansen, former lay missionaries with the Spiritans in Tanzania, moved to Pittsburgh to become the lay directors of the loosely-organized associates.

"Spiritans spirituality flowers in service," they believe. "We must be witnesses by how we live our lives and focus on prayer and action in the world. The Spirit will take you where your talents are most needed."

The U.S. East Province is currently moving toward a new lay program, providing opportunities to join the Province as lay members here at home. Such a model will help unify the Lay Spiritan program across provinces.

A group now meets regularly at Holy Ghost Preparatory School in Philadelphia. John Buettler has been a faculty member at Holy Ghost Preparatory school for 33 years. His wife is Holy Ghost's librarian, so his ties to this Spiritan school are strong. As a member of a Spiritan Lay Associate group that includes other faculty members, John works to uncover how Spiritan spirituality relates to teaching. "Lay people bring an energy to the Spiritan community that comes from being present in and aware of the world. The spirit goes where it will, which is compatible with the life of a lay person who has kids, family, a job. It is a spirituality that interprets life as it is lived. "

John Fitzpatrick coordinates two service trips each year for students at Holy Ghost Preparatory School that give these young people a chance to live the Spiritan call to help those who are most in need. "The trips are designed to get our students out of the protected world of suburban America and into contact with the marginalized" ... one trip takes the students to Harlem to visit St. Mark's, a Spiritan parish that was the first African American parish in the area. In the spring, the students travel to rural West Virginia to help repair dilapidated housing. Before they set off, John arms the students with advice that Father Libermann gave his missionary priests: "Do not judge the people you serve by your own cultural standards, but rather become one with them, adopting their culture in all things that are not contrary to the Gospel." "For our students, Father Libermann's advice translates into openness to the other in service without judgmental attitudes. The students instead try to blend with the community and understand their genuine needs," John notes.

### *Transcanada*

Twelve Lay Spiritans have made a formal commitment to the Spiritans, five are in formation. 80% of the current Lay Spiritans have lived or worked overseas. All have a strong commitment to justice and peace.

"Working towards establishing and living a Culture of Peace is the centre of my spiritual life, my daily life, my life of service to others. In its deepest form it finds expression in my poetry. And for John and me, much of our prayer takes the form of wiping noses, hugging, listening, respecting those whom Jesus served and called "The poor". The children, the handicapped, the oppressed, the victims – these are our vineyard" writes Katie Flaherty, poet and mother of three young children.

Deirdre and Dermot McLoughlin continue their work in Northern Ontario with First Nations people. Deirdre counsels acute sexual assault victims and is involved in Spiritual direction. Dermot



provides health care services at the newly amalgamated Meno-Ya-Win Health Centre and continues to be involved with First Nations in Health Advocacy. He has been appointed to the Board of Directors of the new Northern Ontario Medical School This is the first new Canadian medical school in over 30 years.

The Hamilton & Toronto groups try to meet together once a month, 10-20 people attend monthly home masses (Sept. to May) in Hamilton. They host an annual barbeque for all professed and Lay Spiritans in June. Family masses are held 3 to 4 times a year in Toronto. Northern Lay Spiritans are in regular communication and try to have an annual retreat with a professed Spiritan.

Four Lay Spiritans and Father Mike Doyle CSSp helped to organize and facilitate the *Canadian Networking Conference (Ontario Region) for Lay Associates and Religious*, in Oct. 2002. This was a one day conference for all Lay Associates who are members of a Religious Congregation. Although the associates of other congregations found we had much in common it was clear that the Spiritans are most advanced in fully integrating their Associates in all aspects of congregational life.

Joy Warner (Co-coordinator) & Anne MacGregor-O'Neill are members of the TransCanada Spiritan Office for Justice, Peace and Reconciliation. Gil Joel (a trained nurse in gerontology) sits on the Provinces Committee dealing with retirement and aging issues.

Joy and Gary traveled to Trinidad to make a presentation on Lay Associates to the Trinidad Provincial Chapter in December 2000.

## Canada

Five people have made formal commitments as Spiritan Associates; there were originally seven, but two are now deceased. Three others are currently in formation and there will probably be another in the autumn.

Marie Reine Guilmette writes :

**The priorities and projects of Spiritan Associates in the Province include the following :**

- Helping people with problems :
  - Financial : giving money, clothes, food to the poor;
  - Physical : helping the sick, aiding those who are losing their ability to live independently;
  - Intellectual : helping young people with intellectual problems;
  - Psychological : supporting those who are suffering from depression, stress, old age.
- To encourage awareness on subjects of justice and peace and the integrity of creation. One Person is a member of the Provincial Justice and Peace Committee.
- Work with immigrants and refugees. A deacon is a member of the local clergy; his ministry is devoted to such people.
- Creating a network of exchange and sharing for those who are old or sick – through prayer, Rendering services, meetings and the production of a small pamphlet, « Fraternity of the Holy Spirit ».
- Building closer ties between ourselves, listening to each other more attentively, getting to know people better (associates or professed) both here and elsewhere so as to increase the solidarity of our large Spiritan family.
- Praying for one another.
- Displaying such a quality of life in this world that it will be a witness to the love of God.

### **The challenges, concerns and problems are as follows :**

- Our remunerated work is increasingly demanding and stressful and some meetings outside of working hours are necessary;
- The demands of our family or social duties where, in a way, we are at the service of those close to us;
- Housework : looking after the house, preparing meals, washing, shopping, etc...In general, this means an average of 15 to 25 hours per week for a woman...the equivalent of a second job!
- Age and state of health which limits us occasionally or permanently;
- The concrete commitments that we have already can prevent us from getting involved in new projects initiated by the Province;
- Learning to get a better understanding of other cultures in our own our neighbouring countries, so as to do away with prejudices and have a better appreciation of other people. This is something very different to tolerance; we are talking of developing an attitude of humility and welcome.

### ***Plans for the Future***

- ❑ Allow the Holy Spirit to guide us. While doing our own part, we put ourselves totally in His hands.
- ❑ Continue to deepen what we are doing and accomplish our mission by bringing the love of Christ to others with humility; that alone is already quite something!

- ❑ Help professed Spiritans to appreciate that our daily commitment, in our own context, is truly Spiritan.
- ❑ Pray for each other.

## Issues and Challenges

We have devoted a lot of time to the topic of improving communication internally as well as with the Lay Spiritans of other Provinces and the Congregation. To this end we have recently set up a Lay Spiritan E group through Yahoo moderated by Gary Warner which we encourage you to join. We would also like to have more frequent communication with the General Councilor responsible for Lay Spiritans who might consider facilitating a yearly newsletter for sharing information and insights.

We are trying to build up a library of resources for formation and would appreciate the sharing of videos, prayers, and books from other provinces, and also help with the reproduction of these resources.

In an increasingly diverse Canada, we need to reach out to people of other faith traditions and work to combat racism and intolerance, especially in the context of the so called “war on terror” which threatens civil liberties and creates fear and distrust especially among our Islamic citizens.

Another challenge is how to make our groups more inclusive. We are aware that by and large we are a middle-class group of well educated people and yet we say that our focus is the poor and marginalized. How can we address this and be more welcoming to the poor, the handicapped, and the marginalized?

Finally one of the greatest challenges facing us is the continued growth of Lay Spiritans in the midst of a declining and aging priesthood. In North America we ask ourselves with whom will we be associated in the near future? Today's Lay Spiritans must seek creative and prophetic ways to continue the Congregation's unique



work. These times call not for lay followers but for co-laborers and leaders. Even if working together is not always possible, it is important that the professed Spiritans know about and support the work of the Associates, and vice-versa, and that all our commitments are recognized as Spiritan commitments. In other words mutual collaboration, rather than the traditional view of the laity "helping" "the professed is the way of the future.

We are deeply grateful for the gifts we have received from you and we hope the feeling is mutual.





## The Cover

The triangle represents the Trinity: it is coloured red to accentuate our dedication to the Holy Spirit. The blue circle signifies Mary who became the mother of Jesus through the Holy Spirit: therefore out of the points of the triangle cuts the circle. The green path represents hope. Thus the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, under the protection of Mary, is travelling along the path of hope and trust.

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